

# CHRIST IN THE CAROLS

THIRTY-ONE DEVOTIONS FOR CHRISTMAS

25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION



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FINISH STRONG PUBLISHING

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*The central miracle asserted by Christmas is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man... If the thing happened, it was the central event in the history of the Earth.*

— C.S. LEWIS, MIRACLES



## PREFACE

It's hard to believe that the first edition of this little book was published 25 years ago! That not only makes us feel old, but also testifies to the fact that Jesus, Christmas, and the Word of God remain relevant. Always.

That first edition was actually printed on a home printer and spiral bound at Kinkos. We made about 10 copies and gave them to family and friends. A year or two later, it became a real book with a real publisher.

Fast forward two and a half decades. While the book is now out of print, it continues to be popular. We think the reason is twofold: 1. Nearly everyone enjoys Christmas carols, and more importantly, 2. These wonderful songs are a powerful vehicle for helping us know and grow in Christ.

We're excited to offer it here, in digital form, in the hopes that it will enhance your Christmas experience. Beyond that, we pray that it will draw you closer to Jesus and equip you to walk faithfully and joyfully with Him not just during the holiday season, but throughout the New Year and every day until His glorious appearing.

**Editors Note:** If you are not a follower of Christ, there is a **Special Message** for you at the end of this book. Please turn there now!

## INTRODUCTION

What do you think of when you hear strains of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” or “Joy to the World”? Christmas, of course. These and many other beloved carols play a central role in our yearly celebration of Christ’s birth. We sing them together in our churches, radio stations add them to their regular fare in December, and stores pump orchestrated versions to motivate their patrons to “get into the spirit.” It just wouldn’t be Christmas without Christmas carols.

Though most of us can recite the lyrics to our favorite carols from memory, we sometimes fail to appreciate their messages. It isn’t that their themes are confusing or mysterious. Most are simple songs. The problem is that we have heard them over and over since childhood and become so familiar with them that we tend to take their content for granted. It is easy to sing them each year without really listening to what they’re telling us.

Historically, music of the church has been a source of education and inspiration, teaching us about God and encouraging us to worship Him. Christmas carols are no different. Some speak of deep theological truths concerning the mystery

of the Incarnation. Others offer scriptural descriptions of the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Still others are joyful expressions of childlike faith in response to God's indescribable gift. Together these songs provide us with a poetic, lyrical picture of what Christmas is all about. When examined in light of Scripture, they enable us to more fully comprehend, experience, and respond to the miracle of Christ's birth.

In this book we invite you to take a fresh look at a number of carols and let them become a source of holiday meditation and a vehicle for drawing you closer to Jesus. It is our hope that as you take time out of your busy holiday schedule to engage in these devotions, you and your family will be filled with the same awe, wonder, and joy that inspired the songwriters to pen these carols.

The goal in practicing devotions is to devote oneself to the purpose of fellowshiping with God. With that in mind, consider the following pages as an opportunity to spend time alone with the Lord, to talk with Him, wait upon Him, worship Him, and bask in His presence. If after reading these devotions you are more intimately acquainted with the One whose birthday we celebrate, this book will have achieved its purpose.

### **A Word About Carols**

The origin of the word *carol* is unclear. Some sources believe that it was derived from *choros*, the Greek word for dance. Others argue that it comes from *carole*, a French word that also describes a type of dance, often performed to the music of a flute. In either case, carols seems to have been associated in some way with celebration. During the Middle Ages, when church music consisted solely of Latin plainsong performed by ecclesiastical professionals, carols became popular among common folk. They were easy to sing, often expressed joy, and were usually suitable for dancing. It has been suggested that St. Francis, in his attempt to provide



popular songs of praise in the language of the people, was responsible for the creation of the first Christmas carols.

The term carol came into modern use in England where it was used to describe a “lyrical poem” which addressed Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and other events in the Christian calendar. The English carol adhered to specific rules of structure, usually being made up of stanzas which alternated with a short repeated refrain. Over the years more carols were written about Christmas than any other Christian holiday, causing them to become associated almost exclusively with this season. In recent times, this once narrow category of songs was broadened to include nearly every “song of joy or praise” sung at Christmas, no matter its structure.

We have followed the contemporary definition in selecting the carols for these meditations. Although some are true English carols, most are traditional hymns, songs, and choruses that have become a part of our yearly holiday celebration. Lyrics to some carols differ according to various translations. The renditions reprinted here were selected not because they are the most common or the most authentic, but because they best suit the devotional purposes of this book.

**Editors Note:** We have provided links to YouTube versions of the carols at the end of each devotion - for those who would like to hear them.





**S**ilent Night  
Joseph Mohr, 1818

*Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright,  
Round yon virgin mother and Child  
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night,  
Shepherds quake at the sight,  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts, sing, "Alleluia!"  
Christ, the Savior, is born!  
Christ, the Savior, is born!*

*SILENT NIGHT, holy night,  
Son of God, love's pure light,*

*Radiant beams from Thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

PERHAPS THE BEST known and most widely sung of all the carols, “Silent Night” was born out of necessity. As the story goes, Joseph Mohr, the assistant priest of St. Nicolas parish church in Oberndorf, Austria, wrote this song when the organ malfunctioned on Christmas Eve in 1818. Had he not penned these famous lines and persuaded organist Franz Grüber to set them to music for guitar and voice, the service that evening would truly have been silent.

Though the town of Bethlehem may have been relatively quiet when Jesus was born, it was probably not silent. Crowds of weary travelers were constantly arriving to be counted in the census. They walked the streets searching for places to stay, grumbling as they were turned away from the inn. Tired children whined, women with aching feet complained. And even in the stable where Mary and Joseph took refuge, the donkeys and cows would have continued to produce a variety of grunts and snorts.

Mohr’s song speaks not of a natural silence. It captures a moment of peace, a holy hush that surely settled over Bethlehem as all of heaven viewed with wonder the birth of the God/Man. The Potter had entered into the clay that He Himself had made, and He now rested in the arms of His own creation.

## **REFLECTION**

Because the Christmas season is so hectic and rushed, we

often find it difficult to identify with the “holy hush” of that night. But Scripture implores us to make a practice of pausing from our daily routine – in all seasons – to wait upon God and to listen for His still small voice. As Frederick William Faber once explained, “Whenever the sounds of the world die out in the soul, or sink low, then we hear the whisperings of God.”

Read and pray through the following verses. Ask the Lord to draw you into the awesome silence of His presence and whisper His truth in your ear.

**1 Kings 19:11,12**

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

**Lamentations 3:25,26**

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;  
it is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the Lord.

**Psalm 130:5**

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

**Psalm 46:10**

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."

### **PRAYER**

*Lord, I invite your Spirit to come upon me and calm my busy mind. Quiet my heart as I wait before you. In the silence let me hear you. In the stillness let me know you. Open my eyes that I may see your glory and receive the grace you have extended to me today.*

\*LISTEN to *Silent Night*



**C**ome, All Ye Shepherds  
Bohemian Folk Song

*Come, all ye shepherds, ye children of earth,  
Come ye, bring greetings to yon heavenly birth.  
For Christ the Lord to all men is given,  
To be our Saviour sent down from heaven:  
Come, welcome Him!*

*Hasten, then, hasten to Bethlehem's stall,  
There to see heaven descend to us all.  
With holy feeling, there humbly kneeling,  
We will adore Him, bow down before Him,  
Worship the King.*

*Angels and shepherds together we go,  
Seeking this Saviour from all earthly woe;  
While angels, winging, His praise are singing,  
Heaven's echoes ringing, peace on earth bringing,  
Good will to men.*

This Bohemian folk song is a call to worship. Notice the writer's gentle but stirring invitation in the first stanza – *come, come, come, welcome him*. He repeatedly exhorts us to drop what we are doing and turn our attention to our Savior.

Similarly, in the second stanza we are invited to see heaven descend. What should be our response to the human manifestation of Almighty God? Holy awe, humility, prostrating ourselves in adoration. This is how a king is to be worshipped.

Jesus no longer walks the earth as a man. Yet the Spirit is moving across the earth, drawing those who are weighted down with woes. Like the shepherds in this carol, we are called to join our voices with the angels, proclaiming peace to a world of violence and strife, goodwill in a land of hatred, bitterness, and despair. The Father is fashioning His people into a responsive chord, that we may ever echo the message of heaven: Jesus is Lord!

### REFLECTION

Psalm 100 is a mini-treatise on worship. It tells us how God expects us to behave as we approach Him. As you read it, invite the Spirit to provide insight into how it should apply to your life. Act out the directives. Ask God for the freedom and boldness to do what the psalmist calls for.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving



and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.

**PRAYER**

*Father, I accept Your call to worship. Teach me how to enter Your gates, how to act in Your courts. And as I spend time in Your presence, fashion me into an instrument of proclamation, that my voice might join the angels in sharing Your Good News to a dying world.*

\*LISTEN TO *COME, All Ye Shepherds*



**G**od Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen  
English Traditional, 18th Century

*God rest ye merry, gentlemen,  
Let nothing you dismay,  
Remember Christ our Savior  
Was born on Christmas Day;  
To save us all from Satan's power  
When we were gone astray.*

*O tidings of comfort and joy  
Comfort and joy,  
O tidings of comfort and joy.*

*In Bethlehem, in Jewry,  
This blessed Babe was born,  
And laid within a manger,  
Upon this blessed morn;  
The which His mother Mary  
Did nothing take in scorn.*

*From God our Heavenly Father,  
A blessed angel came;  
And unto certain shepherds  
Brought tidings of the same:  
How that in Bethlehem was born  
The Son of God by Name.*

The title and first line of this familiar carol are often misunderstood. The lyrics are not referring to a group of merry gentlemen. Instead, they are actually a prayer of blessing addressed to gentlemen. “God rest ye merry” was an old English expression which petitioned God to keep one merry or joyful. “God bless you with joy, you gentlemen” might be an accurate modern-day rendering of the phrase.

It stands to reason that those who are already merry would have no need of such a blessing. Rather it is the lonely and sorrowful, those who are “dismayed,” who require comfort. To those in such need, the writer of this carol prescribes the only sure cure – the good news of Jesus.

In singing “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen,” we are verbally extending God’s blessing, His power to encourage and refresh, to the oppressed. In listening to it, we are afforded the opportunity to receive that blessing, and with it, His joy.

### **REFLECTION**

Is there something in your life that is robbing you of joy? Are you in need of comfort? As you read the following verses, remember that they are true and faithful words from God to you.

**2 Corinthians 1:3,4**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

**2 Thessalonians 2:16,17**

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

**Zephaniah 3:17**

The Lord your God is with you,  
the Mighty Warrior who saves.  
He will take great delight in you;  
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,  
but will rejoice over you with singing.”

**Psalms 16:11**

You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

**PRAYER**

*How I long to know the joy and the pleasure of Your presence.  
Lord, draw me close and let me rest in Your arms. Hold me,  
refresh me, renew me in Your love.*

\*LISTEN to *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*



**N**ow Sing We, Now Rejoice  
Translated by A.T. Russell, 1851

*Now sing we, now rejoice,  
Now raise to heaven our voice;  
Lo! He from whom joy streameth,  
Poor in the manger lies;  
Yet not so brightly beameth  
The sun in yonder skies!  
Thou my Saviour art!  
Thou my Saviour art!*

*Given from on high to me,  
I cannot rise to Thee:  
O cheer my wearied spirit:  
O pure and holy Child,  
Through all Thy grace and merit,  
Blest Jesus! Lord most mild,  
Draw me after Thee!*

*Draw me after Thee!*

*Now through His Son doth shine  
The Father's grace divine:  
Death over us hath reigned  
Through sin and vanity:  
The Son for us obtained  
Eternal joy on high.  
May we praise Him there!  
May we praise Him there!*

*O where shall joy be found?  
Where but on heavenly ground?  
Where now the angels singing  
With all His saints unite,  
Their sweetest praises bringing  
In heavenly joy and light:  
May we praise Him there!  
May we praise Him there!*

This old Latin hymn is an overview of the Christian walk. In the first stanza the writer tells of Jesus' birth and welcomes Him as Savior. In the second stanza he recognizes Jesus' identity and commits to following after Him. Next he recounts what Jesus has accomplished, ending in an exhortation to praise. Finally, he looks forward to the joys of our heavenly home. Salvation, discipleship, worship, the hope of eternal life – the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

## **REFLECTIONS**

It's helpful to make a practice of returning to the basics in our life with Christ. These fundamentals support our faith when we face various challenges and hardships. As you examine each of the passages listed below, allow the Word to

renew your mind and perspective. Use these verses to reaffirm your commitment to Jesus.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:9-10**

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

### **Matthew 16:24-25**

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

### **Romans 12:1**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

### **PRAYER**

*Jesus, I confess again today that You are my Savior. Even as I celebrate Your earthly birth, I commit myself to following You. Draw me in Your steps. Keep my eyes focused on You alone. May I live to the praise of Your glory.*

. . .

\*LISTEN TO *NOW SING WE, Now Rejoice*





*I* t Came Upon a Midnight Clear  
Edmund H. Sears, 1850

*It came upon a midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
To touch their harps of gold;  
“Peace on the earth, good will to men  
From heaven’s all-gracious King.”  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
To hear the angels sing.*

*Still through the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled;  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O’er all the weary world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o’er its Babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing.*

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love song which they bring:  
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.*

*O ye beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow;  
Look now, for glad and golden hours  
Come swiftly on the wing;  
Oh, rest beside the weary road  
And hear the angels sing.*

*For lo! The days are hast'ning on,  
By prophets seen of old,  
When with the ever-circling years  
Shall come the time foretold,  
When peace shall over all the earth  
Its ancient splendors fling,  
And the whole world give back the song  
Which now the angels sing.*

Notice the adjectives employed in this familiar carol: solemn, weary, sad, lowly, crushing, painful... These words depict a people who are burdened, bent low by the “woes of sin and strife,” and forced to toil over each step. Edmund Sears was obviously describing the plight of fallen mankind. To put it in the modern vernacular, “Life is hard and then we die.”

But Sears offers an antidote for the dreary existence of fallen man. “Look now,” he implores, “for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing; Oh, rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.” This is not a trite exhortation to “cheer up” or “keep a stiff upper lip.” The message which the angels delivered was wrought with hope. “Peace on earth,” they proclaimed, “Good will to men...” It was news that the Answer to life’s questions and problems had come to earth. The Power of God now walked among men. Present was the One who could free them from the burden of sin, who could enable them to know joy and peace.

One day all of creation will join in that song, lifting praise to the Prince of Peace. But we don’t have to wait until the rapture or the second advent. We can begin singing today, celebrating the first advent, anticipating His glorious appearing, and sharing the news with those who are downtrodden.

## REFLECTION

The peace of Christ is available today. As you read the following verses, ask Jesus to give you rest and to show you how to live in the freedom He has provided.

### **Matthew 11:28-30**

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

### **John 14:27**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

## PRAYER

*Lord, I lay my worries, my hurts, and my sins at Your feet. They are much too heavy and painful for me to bear. I am crushed beneath their weight. Free me, heal me, and forgive me according to Your grace. Breathe Your life into my soul, Your peace into my heart. Let me find my rest and life in You.*

\*LISTEN to *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*



**C**ome, Thou Long-Expected Jesus  
Charles Wesley, 1744

*Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in Thee.*

*Israel's Strength and Consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear Desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.*

*Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child, and yet a king,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.*

*By Thine own eternal spirit,*

*Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all-sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

For centuries God had promised to send His Anointed One to rescue Israel. The Scriptures were filled with prophecies of His coming kingdom, His power, and His love. But there had been silence for nearly four hundred years – no sign, no word.

Some had grown weary of waiting, their faith eroded by the passage of time. Others remained hopeful, watching, wondering as the years slowly slipped by. They read about Him, looked for Him, and prayed for His arrival.

This carol by Charles Wesley captures the deep yearning the Israelites must have felt as they awaited Messiah's day. How they longed for their Strength and Consolation to appear. How they hoped to see the Desire of Nations arise.

Looking back, it is difficult for us to fully appreciate their sense of anticipation. Yet we find ourselves in a similar situation. When Jesus left, He promised to return, and after some two thousand years, we continue to await that joyous event. Even as we celebrate His birth, we too lift our voices to cry, "Come, Thou long-expected Jesus!"

## **REFLECTION**

The Bible says that faith is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). We can be sure that Jesus will come again soon and will establish the fullness of His kingdom on the earth. Though we cannot see it yet, we know that day is swiftly approaching.

**Hebrews 12:1-2**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

**2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9**

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

**Revelation 22:20**

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

**PRAYER**

*Jesus, as I eagerly anticipate Your appearing, I invite You to come now and reign in my life. I ask that Your eternal Spirit would rule in my heart. Usher me into Your glorious presence by Your grace and favor, that I may worship before Your throne.*

\*LISTEN TO *COME, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*





**G**ood Christian Men, Rejoice  
Translated by John M. Neale, 1853

*Good Christian men, rejoice,  
With heart and soul and voice;  
Give ye heed to what we say:  
Jesus Christ is born today.  
Ox and ass before Him bow,  
And He is in the manger now.  
Christ is born today!*

*Good Christian men, rejoice,  
With heart and soul and voice;  
Now ye hear of endless bliss:  
Jesus Christ was born for this!  
He hath ope'd the heavenly door,  
And man is blessed evermore.  
Christ was born for this!*

*Good Christian men, rejoice,*

*With heart and soul and voice;  
Now ye need not fear the grave:  
Jesus Christ was born to save!  
Calls you one and calls you all  
To gain His everlasting hall.  
Christ was born to save!*

Though the origin of this carol is unknown, its message is clear. In each stanza it urges us to rejoice, and to do so with all of our being and faculties. Like the ox and ass who are portrayed as bowing before the newborn Christ, the writer asks us to humble our hearts before the King. He invites us to celebrate the finished work of Jesus upon the cross, which literally “ope’d the heavenly door” and won our salvation.

Think of it. We have been rescued from the tyranny of death and sin. Those evil taskmasters no longer rule over us. They have been vanquished, conquered, defeated. We who once were in bondage to sin and so afraid of death have been set free to serve a God who is slow to anger, full of mercy and compassion. Jesus is our new Master, and love is the new law by which we live. That news not only causes our hearts to rejoice, but gives us good reason to shout the gospel to the world around us. As the writer of this carol exhorts, may we evermore proclaim that “Jesus saves!”

### **REFLECTION**

To rejoice literally means to “see joy,” or to be delighted. The joy this song asks us to see is Jesus. He is the source and object of our joy, for in Him we find our delight. No matter our circumstance, Jesus, our joy, is ever present, never changing. Therefore, we will always have reason to rejoice.

The Bible commands us to rejoice on numerous occasions.

Read through the following verses with an eye toward understanding this activity. Ask yourself this question: What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? Then read them again, intent on obeying them.

**1 Thessalonians 5:15 (AMP)**

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek that which is good for one another and for all people.

**Psalm 5:11 (AMP)**

But let all who take refuge *and* put their trust in You rejoice,

Let them ever sing for joy;

Because You cover *and* shelter them,

Let those who love Your name be joyful *and* exult in You.

**Psalm 32:11 (AMP)**

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous [who actively seek right standing with Him];

Shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

**Philippians 4:4 (AMP)**

Rejoice in the Lord always [delight, take pleasure in Him]; again I will say, rejoice!

**Psalm 9:1-2 (AMP)**

I will give thanks *and* praise the Lord, with all my heart;

I will tell aloud all Your wonders *and* marvelous deeds.

I will rejoice and exult in you;

I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

**PRAYER**

*Father, the gift of Your Son has made my heart glad! This*

*day, no matter what I encounter, I will choose to look to you and “see joy.” With all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, I will rejoice and celebrate Your goodness. You alone are my delight, my all in all.*

\*LISTEN TO *GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, Rejoice*



*A* s **With Gladness Men of Old**  
William C. Dix, 1860

*As with gladness men of old  
Did the guiding star behold;  
As with joy they hailed its light,  
Leading onward, beaming bright;  
So, most gracious God, may we  
Evermore be led to Thee.*

*As with joyful steps they sped  
To that lowly manger bed,  
There to bend the knee before  
Him whom heaven and earth adore;  
So may we with willing feet  
Ever seek Thy mercy seat*

*As they offered gifts most rare  
At that manger rude and bare,  
So may we with holy joy,*

*Pure and free from sin's alloy,  
All our costliest treasures bring,  
Christ, to Thee, our heavenly King.*

*Holy Jesus, every day  
Keep us in the narrow way;  
And, when earthly things are past,  
Bring or ransomed souls at last  
Where they need no star to guide,  
Where no clouds Thy glory hide.*

*In the heavenly county bright  
Need they no created light;  
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,  
Thou its sun which goes not down;  
Then forever may we sing  
Hallelujah to our King!*

In this beautifully poetic carol, William C. Dix makes mention of an important Old Testament concept. In the second stanza, he talks about seeking the “mercy seat.” This was the covering or lid on the ark of the covenant, the chest God instructed the ancient Israelites to construct. The ark was a sacred vessel that held the stone tablets of the testimony, a container of manna, and Aaron’s rod. Its most important function, however, was in atoning for the sins of the people.

Each year on the great Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle or temple. There he would sprinkle the blood, first of a bull and later of a goat, on and in front of the mercy seat. It was above this “atonement seat” that God’s manifest presence dwelt. As the priest offered this yearly sacrifice before Him, God had mercy on the people, forgiving their sin and rebellion.

When Christ came, He filled the roles of both high priest and sacrifice. Entering into the Holy of Holies by His own blood, He became the mediator of a new covenant, or agreement. By His blood we may now receive forgiveness and have the privilege of approaching God's throne of grace – the mercy seat.

### **REFLECTION**

Many elements of the Old Testament tabernacle were types that pointed to Jesus. In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews explores a number of these amazing symbols and prophecies, explaining how they were fulfilled by Christ. The ninth chapter in particular provides a fascinating discussion of this subject.

#### **Hebrews 9:1-12**

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed

in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

### **PRAYER**

*Jesus, thank You for becoming my high priest and for laying down Your life as a sacrifice. Thank You for atoning for my sin once and for all. Thank You for reconciling me to God. By Your blood, I now enter the Holy of Holies to bow before the mercy seat.*

\*LISTEN to *As With Gladness Men of Old*





**O Little Town of Bethlehem**  
Phillips Brooks, 1868

*O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary,  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wond'ring love.*

*O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth,*

*And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to men on earth.*

*How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him, still  
The dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem!  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sins, and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel!*

While touring the Holy Land in 1865, Phillips Brooks spent Christmas Eve in and around Bethlehem, looking out over the shepherds' fields, gazing at the town, and attending a church service. What he saw there captured his imagination. "It seemed as if I could hear voices I know well," he said, "telling each other of the 'Wonderful Night' of the Saviour's birth." Three years later he poured his impressions of that night into this song.

Brooks was awed by the magnitude of the "wonderous gift" that had been given. On the first Christmas, God presented mankind with a bundle of life. Wrapped up in swad-

ding clothes in that crude stable in Bethlehem was His own Son. As this carol puts it, His divine intention was to “impart to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.” Jesus’ birth was just the start of that plan. The Gift found His ultimate fulfillment on a cross at Calvary some thirty-three years later. The death and resurrection of Christ made God’s blessing – forgiveness and eternal life with Him - available to all.

### REFLECTION

Thanksgiving is an appropriate attitude to adopt at Christmas. Let these verses help you present a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father and invite the Son to make His home in you.

#### **Romans 4:25-5:2**

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

#### **Romans 8:1-2**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

#### **2 Corinthians 9:15**

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

### PRAYER

*I give thanks, Father, for Your indescribably Gift. How*

*amazing is the love that compelled You to send Your Son that I might have life! I welcome You, Jesus. Show me my sin that I may be free from it, and that Your home – my heart – may be pure and holy. O come to me, abide in me, my Lord Emmanuel.*

\*LISTEN to *O Little Town of Bethlehem*



**O** Thou Joyful day  
Anonymous, 18th Century

*O thou joyful day, O thou blessed day,  
Holy, peaceful Christmastide!  
Earth's hopes awaken, Christ life has taken,  
Laud Him, O laud Him on every side!*

*O thou joyful day, O thou blessed day,  
Holy, peaceful Christmastide!  
Christ's light is beaming, our souls redeeming,  
Laud Him, O laud Him on every side!*

*O thou joyful day, O thou blessed day,  
Holy, peaceful Christmastide!  
King of all glory, we bow before Thee,  
Laud Him, O laud Him on every side!*

The hope which was awakened at the Incarnation went far beyond humankind. Adam's sin had subjected the entire

universe to death and decay. Paul tells us that man's fall frustrated creation, forcing it to endure a painful period of waiting until it could be redeemed and liberated from bondage. The holiday we call Christmas is a celebration of that Redeemer's birth.

Paul further explains that creation is today eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons of God. The Creator's handiwork is actually groaning in anticipation of the day when our true identity as the redeemed children of God is made known. When Jesus returns and that disclosure is made, all of nature – the heavens, the stars, the earth, the sea, the fields, mountains, hills, trees, and rivers – will shout and sing for joy.

The light of hope which was ignited on that first Christmas continues to burn brightly as God's people and His handiwork look forward to Jesus' return.

### **REFLECTION**

To redeem means to buy back or recover. God sent Jesus to buy back that which was God's in the first place. Rather than give us up for lost, God paid a heavy price – the lifeblood of His only Son – to rescue us and restore us to a relationship with him. As you read the following selections, thank God for His willingness to pay such a cost for your life.

#### **Galatians 3:13-14**

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

**Ephesians 1:7-8**

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,

**Hebrews 9:15**

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

**Psalm 107:1-3**

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.  
Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story,  
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,  
those he gathered from the lands,  
from east and west, from north and south.

**PRAYER**

*Father, thank You for purchasing my life with the blood of Your Son. My mind can hardly comprehend such love. I am forever grateful. Like the carol writer, I too bow down before the King of all glory. Jesus, Lamb of God, You are worthy to be lauded – praised and extolled. Thank You for enduring the shame, anguish, and torture of the cross to rescue me from death. From this day forth through all eternity, I will lift glory and honor to Your name.*

\*LISTEN to *O Thou Joyful Day*



*T*he Happy Christmas Comes Once More  
Nicolai F. S. Grundtvig, 1817

*The happy Christmas comes once more,  
The heavenly Guest is at the door,  
The blessed words the shepherds thrill,  
The joyous tidings; Peace, good will*

*O wake, our hearts, in gladness sing,  
And keep our Christmas with our King  
Like the sound of mighty water rolls.*

*Come, Jesus, glorious heavenly Guest,  
Keep Thine own Christmas in our breast;  
Then David's harpstrings, hushed so long,  
Shall swell our jubilee of song.*

What is Christmas? Is it simply a yearly excuse to engage in extended spending frenzies? Is it nothing more than an annual



exercise in overindulgence? Is the holiday season merely a chance to party? While Christians are quick to answer these questions with a resounding “no,” we too often miss the real “reason for the season.”

Christmas is more than just a day set aside to mark the birth of an ancient religious leader. It does commemorate Christ’s birth, but it also has a much greater, more practical significance. In Christmas we find a unique opportunity to celebrate a two-thousand-year-old birth with the birthday Boy Himself. The message of Christmas is that Jesus is alive to celebrate with us. As this carol reminds us, He is the guest of honor at this wondrous yearly feast. He is the star attraction and central focus around which all the festivities should revolve. Even now, Jesus is patiently waiting to gain entry to our hearts, homes, churches, and cities, so that He may celebrate this joyous occasion with us.

### REFLECTION

In the flurry of activity that we call Christmas, our attention is easily distracted from the One we seek to honor. Yet the heavenly Guest continues to all to us. He patiently raps on the door of our heart, ready to come in and fellowship with us. What will our response be? Will we hear Him? Will we welcome Him in?

### Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

### PRAYER

*Lord, I hear You knocking. Come in and make Your home*

*in my heart. Dwell here with me, so that my body may be Your house, Your temple. Cause living song to rise from my soul as I keep this Christmas with You, my loving King.*

\*LISTEN to *The Happy Christmas Comes Once More*



**O** Holy Night!  
M. Cappeau De Roquemaure

*O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth;  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;  
Fall on your knees,  
Oh, hear the angel voices!  
O night divine,  
O night when Christ was born!  
O night, O holy night, O night divine!*

*Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,  
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,  
Here came the Wise Men from Orient land.  
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,*

*In all our trials born to be our friend;  
He knows our need,  
To our weakness is no stranger;  
Behold your King,  
Before Him lowly bend.*

*Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love, and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall be break, for the slave is our brother,  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,  
Let all within us praise His holy name!  
Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!  
His power and glory ever more proclaim!*

This French carol is a lyrical retelling of the Good News of the gospel message. In the first stanza, De Roquemaure asks us to close our eyes and imagine the world before the advent of Jesus. There it lay, “in sin and error pining.” To appreciate the truthfulness of this phrase, we must understand that the word *pinning* means the wasting away of the human spirit as it grieves, mourns, and endures pain. This desperate state was the result of the Fall – Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the Garden. Banished from God’s presence, the human race was left to be tormented by sin until... “He appeared.” Suddenly there was cause for hope, suddenly there was cause for joy.

In the next stanza, the writer expounds on the Incarnation – the divine walking in human form. Rather than judge from above, the Lord came down and experienced our need and weakness firsthand. He now truly understands our situation and offers us the necessary comfort and grace to deal with it. Furthermore, De Roquemaure explains, this Jesus welcomes us as friends. Mere humans becoming friends with God? It’s

mind-boggling. No wonder the hearts of those who beheld this Child glowed.

Messiah's mission is the focus of the final stanza. Love is the law of the kingdom He came to establish in our hearts. Mercy and justice are its outworkings – freedom and celebration, its rewards. De Roquemaure leaves us with a familiar exhortation, the command that sounds throughout God's kingdom: "Praise His name forever! His power and glory evermore proclaim!"

### REFLECTION

The gospel message, though infinitely profound, came be summed up in three simple parts: Jesus came, Jesus died, Jesus rose again. He came to save us, died to free us, and rose victoriously to rule over us. Scripture makes it clear that He is to be our Savior, Redeemer, and King. Ask Him to reveal Himself in these roles as you read the following verses.

#### **John 4:42**

They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

#### **Luke 1:68**

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

#### **Galatians 4:4-5**

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

#### **Luke 19:37-38**

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

### **Revelation 19:16**

On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:  
king of kings and lord of lords.

### **PRAYER**

*Thank You, Jesus, for securing my salvation and freedom. Thank You for loving me so much that You came to rescue me. I testify that You are my Savior. As I am washed by Your blood, bathed in blessed forgiveness, I confess that You are my Redeemer. In gratitude, I fall on my knees and submit to Your rule and reign. I exalt You as my King. I will praise You forever. Your power and glory I will evermore proclaim.*

\*LISTEN to *O Holy Night*



**T**hou Didst Leave Thy Throne  
Emily E.S. Elliot, 1864

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy Kingly crown  
When Thou camest to earth for me;  
But in Bethlehem's home there was found no room  
For Thy holy nativity.  
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus –  
There is room in my heart for Thee!*

*Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,  
Proclaiming Thy royal decree;  
But in lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,  
And in great humility.*

*The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest  
In the shade of a forest tree;  
But Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God  
In the deserts of Galilee*

*Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word  
That should set Thy people free;  
But with mocking scorn and with crown of thorn  
They bore Thee to Calvary.*

*When the heavens shall ring and the angels sing  
At Thy coming to victory,  
Let Thy voice call me home, saying, "Yet there is room,  
There is room at My side for thee!"  
And my heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,  
When Thou comest and callest for me.*

Jesus' lowly birth foretold of a lowly life to come. "The foxes found rest, and the birds their next," Elliot says, paraphrasing Matthew 8:20, "but Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God." He not only had nowhere to lay His head but was scorned and rejected by the very creatures He had come to liberate. Still, He willingly subjected Himself to their cruel torture and allowed Himself to be executed in order to win their freedom.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus agreed to endure such shame and pain? Why did He leave His throne and His kingly crown to come to earth? What could have possibly motivated the Son of God to become a Man? The answer is profound, yet simple: love. The Father's love for us is so great, so very intense, that it motivated Him to go to whatever lengths necessary to draw us to His side – even asking His own Son to discard His glory, enter creation, and give up His life. And Jesus, out of His love for the Father and His love for us, said yes. What a wonderful testimony to the size and scope of God's unfailing, unmerited love.

## REFLECTION



Read the following passages carefully. They are very familiar to many of us, perhaps too familiar. Ask the Lord to take these verses off the page and apply them to your heart.

**John 3:16-17**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

**Ephesians 3:17-19**

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

**Romans 8:38-39**

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**PRAYER**

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus. There is room in my heart for Thee. At Thy coming victory let Thy voice call me home, saying, "Yet there is room, there is room at My side for thee!" And my heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus, when Thou comest and callest for me.*

\*LISTEN to *Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne*



*A*ngels, From the Realms of Glory  
James Montgomery, 1816

*Angels, from the realms of glory,  
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
Ye who sang creation's story,  
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:*

*Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the newborn King.*

*Shepherds, in the field abiding,  
Watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with man is now residing,  
Yonder shines the infant Light.*

*Sages, leave your contemplations,  
Brighter visions beam afar;  
Seek the great Desire of nations,  
Ye have seen His natal star.*

Some say that Moravian hymn writer James Montgomery, who penned more than four hundred songs, rivaled Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts in skill. This, his best known work, has been heralded as a masterpiece. One observer even argued that “for comprehensiveness, appropriateness of expression, force and elevation of sentiment, it may challenge comparison with any hymn that was ever written, in any language or country.” While that may or may not be true, it has certainly become a holiday favorite.

Though much could be said for the content of the descriptive lyrics, the simple refrain clearly reflects the essence of the Christmas message. The invitation to worship, which was accorded the angels, shepherds, and sages, continues to issue forth. This call is as urgent and open today as it was two thousand years ago. No longer a “newborn,” the risen Christ is all the more worthy of praise. What an honor we have – the privilege of bowing down before the King of kings!

### **REFLECTION**

Let these verses lead you into His presence so that you may know and experience the joy and delight of worship.

#### **Psalm 29:1-2**

Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
worship the Lord in the splendor of his  
holiness.

#### **Psalm 5:7**

But I, by your great love,  
can come into your house;

in reverence I bow down  
toward your holy temple.

**Psalm 66:1-4**

Shout for joy to God, all the earth!

Sing the glory of his name;  
make his praise glorious.

Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power  
that your enemies cringe before you.

All the earth bows down to you;

they sing praise to you,  
they sing the praises of your name."

**PRAYER**

*I humble myself before Your awesome presence, O Lord. Search my heart that it may be pure before You. My desire this day is to respond to the call that sounds from Your holy throne, the invitation which forever resonates through all heaven and earth. I bow before You, Living God. I come that I might worship Jesus.*

\*LISTEN TO *ANGELS*, *From the Realms of Glory*



**G**olden Mornings  
English Traditional, 18th Century

*They saw the light shine out afar  
On Christmas in the morning;  
And straight they knew it was the star,  
That came to give them warning;  
Then did they fall on bended knee,  
The light their heads adorning,  
And praised the Lord, who let them see  
His glory in the morning.*

*For three short years he went abroad  
And set men's hearts a-burning;  
That mission turned the world to God  
And brought the night to morning:  
He bore for man repulse and pain,  
Ingratitude and scorning;  
He suffered, died, and rose again  
At Easter in the morning.*

*O every thought be of his grace,  
On each day in the morning;  
And for his kingdom's loveliness  
Our souls be ever yearning:  
So may we live, to Heaven our hearts  
In hope forever turning;  
Then may we die, as each departs,  
In joy at our new morning.*

The three stanzas of this carol encompass the whole of the Christian life: Christmas, Easter, and the walk of faith. Jesus came, and light shattered the darkness. Jesus died and rose again, and hope sprang up afresh. Jesus invites us to come, and His grace seeks us out. This melodic capsule of the Good News is what the world is dying to hear.

Although the song has much to offer, one particular phrase seems to stand out. The writer says that during the days of His earthly ministry, Jesus “set men’s hearts a-burning.” This is true in at least two distinct ways. First, Jesus fanned to flame the hunger for God that resides in each person’s heart. By becoming a mediator between humans and God, He renewed the hope that had nearly died in the breasts of humankind – that they could know God. He ignited a host of hearts to seek the Father.

Jesus is also described in Scripture as a refiner’s fire – an extremely hot flame that burns away the dross and impurities found in gold and silver. He not only came to set hearts afire but to confront, root out, and defeat sin in all of its various forms. Even those men who resisted His mission must have felt the heat of that fiery message as it burned deep within them.

**REFLECTION**

Whether it be a searing hunger for God or a flaming consciousness of sin, each encounter with Jesus leaves our hearts burning. As you read the following verses, ask the Lord to purify your heart and engulf you in His fiery passion.

**Deuteronomy 4:24**

For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

**Malachi 3:2-3**

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver...

**Matthew 3:11**

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

**PRAYER**

*All-consuming Fire, I humbly submit myself to the testing of Your mighty hand. Burn away all that is not holy, all that is not of You. Refiner's Fire, separate the dross that weighs down my heart, the evil and sin that cannot bear the brilliance of Your presence. Place in my Your fire – a zeal for You, for Your kingdom, and for the lost whom You long to embrace. Amen.*



**G**ood King Wenceslas  
John M. Neale, 1853

*Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the Feast of Stephen,  
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even:  
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was  
cruel,*

*When a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.*

*“Hither, page, and stand by me, if thou know’st it, telling,  
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?”*

*“Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the  
mountain,*

*Right against the forest fence, by Saint Anges’ fountain.”*

*“Bring me fresh, and bring me wine, bring me pinelogs  
hither;*

*Thou and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither.”*

*Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went together;*



*Through the rude wind's wild lament, and the bitter weather.*

*"Sire, the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger;  
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer."*

*"Mark my footsteps, good my page; tread thou in them  
boldly:*

*Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy blood less coldly."*

*In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted;  
Heat was in the very sod, which the Saint had printed.*

*Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing,  
Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.*

Though this carol does not mention Christ by name or recount his birth, it contains the essence of the Christmas message: God reaching out to humanity.

King Wenceslas the Holy, who ruled Bohemia from A.D. 1378 to 1419, was known for his good works and his care for the poor. In this song, which is based on legend, John Neale portrays him as a man of grace. Rather than order his servants to leave a few morsels or fire logs for the underprivileged peasant or send his page out to find the man and deliver some seasonal gift, Wenceslas chooses to take action himself. Leaving the warmth of his castle, the king braves fierce wind and bitter cold to search out the man. Whether factual or myth, the great compassion demonstrated by Wenceslas reflects God's heart for the lost and the poor.

Jesus said that He came to seek and to save the lost. This is the primary reason that God chose to become Man. Not content to send others in His place, the King of glory left

heaven and came looking for us. Braving hostile elements, even unto death, He personally sought us out.

To those who have been found, who have been rescued and now reside safe and secure within the walls of His kingdom, Jesus gives this charge: "Follow me." Like the page, we are to follow in our Master's footsteps as He continues to pursue the abandoned, the orphaned, the poor, and the lost. We shall undoubtedly encounter darkness and the bitter winds of trial and testing as we submit to such service. Yet He goes before us, clearing the path, shielding us from the wind, and leading us forward. As we boldly tread in Jesus' steps, we find ourselves revived by His strength, revitalized by His power, and warmed by His holy fire.

### **REFLECTION**

We shall find blessing as we minister to the poor. The following verses illustrate God's fervent desire to reach out to those in need.

#### **Proverbs 14:21;31**

It is a sin to despise one's neighbor,  
but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy.

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their  
Maker,

but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

#### **James 1:27**

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

#### **Matthew 25:31-40**

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the

angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

### **PRAYER**

Ask God to bring you into contact with those who are spiritually and physically needy, at Christmas and throughout the year. Allow Him to show you how to minister to them and let Him provide you with the resources. Tell Him that you want to be a faithful servant, walking in the Master’s steps and extending His blessing to the poor and the lost.

\*LISTEN to *Good King Wenceslas*



**L**ove Came Down at Christmas  
Christina Rossetti, 1893

*Love came down at Christmas  
Love all lovely, Love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Stars and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, Love divine;  
Worship we our Jesus:  
But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token,  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

This carol is a poetic paraphrase of a theme that runs

throughout the first epistle of John. The apostle says that God is love, that His very nature and character are summed up in that one word. John goes on to explain that God displayed His love by sending His only Son into the world to atone for our sin. As Rossetti puts it, He is “love incarnate, love divine.” In the popular vernacular, Jesus is “love with legs.”

John further notes that Jesus is an expression of the highest form of love in that He laid down His own life for His friends. By enduring shame and suffering, He became a living portrait of God’s love. Songwriter Graham Kendrick marveled at this: “My Lord, what love is that, that pays so dearly...? Amazing love, O what sacrifice, the Son of God, giv’n for me. My debt he pays, and my death he dies, that I might live.”

John, Rossetti, and Kendrick were all astonished by the extent, abundance, and generosity of God’s love. Yet even as they reveled in it, they recognized that it demanded a response. It was meant to be received and lived. As Rossetti reminds us, “Love shall be our token.” Encountering the living Christ brings us face-to-face with pure love. This experience transforms us into a people who are characterized by love. The love of God becomes the token or evidence of our identity, the sign by which others may recognize us as followers of Jesus.

### **REFLECTION**

John mentions love often in his writings. Reading his gospel account and letters with an eye toward the word “love” would be a worthwhile study. The following verses offer a brief overview.

#### **John 3:16**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only

Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

### **John 13:34-35**

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

### **John 15:9-10**

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”

### **1 John 3:16-18**

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

### **1 John 4:7-8**

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

### **PRAYER**

*Father, in celebrating Christmas I am celebrating Jesus, the expression of Your lavish, amazing, divine love. At the carol’s urging, I worship Him, love incarnate. May the love of Christ flow like rivers from the depths of my being. May I henceforth be*

*known as a lover of God and of men. As I choose to walk with  
You this day, let love be the token of my life.*

\*LISTEN to *Love Came Down at Christmas*



*I* **Heard the Bells on Christmas Day**  
Henry W. Longfellow, 1863

*I heard the bells on Christmas day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

*I thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head:  
"There is no peace on earth," I said,  
"For hate is strong  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men!"*



*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead; nor doth he sleep!  
The wrong shall fail,  
The right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men!”*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the words of this familiar carol during a period of intense conflict. The nation was locked in a bloody battle, North pitted against South in a struggle to the death, as the Civil War threatened to tear the United States apart.

Surveying the situation, Longfellow was overcome with despair. It appeared that evil had triumphed over good, strife had replaced peace. The message of Christmas seemed distant, even futile. Then he heard it – the sound of the bells. Church bells ringing, proclaiming peace on earth, good will to men. Surrounded on all sides by death and hatred, the bells were a necessary reminder that God was at work. He had not forsaken His people.

Just as the bells encouraged Longfellow, the words of this carol refresh and renew our hope. They remind us that no matter what happens, no matter how bleak the circumstance, God is still in control and He is faithful. “Jesus is alive!” the bells continue to ring out. “And His kingdom will never end!”

### **REFLECTION**

Is God faithful? Does He really mean what He says? Can we trust Him? The answer is yes. Let these promises enliven your faith and give you the confidence to stand firm against trials and tribulations.

### **Deuteronomy 7:9**

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the

faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

**Psalm 145:14-20**

The Lord upholds all who fall  
and lifts up all who are bowed down.  
The eyes of all look to you,  
and you give them their food at the proper  
time.  
You open your hand  
and satisfy the desires of every living  
thing.  
The Lord is righteous in all his ways  
and faithful in all he does.  
The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.  
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;  
he hears their cry and saves them.  
The Lord watches over all who love him,  
but all the wicked he will destroy.

**1 Corinthians 1:9**

God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Psalm 121**

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not  
slumber;

indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord watches over you—  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;  
the Lord will watch over your coming and  
going  
both now and forevermore.

### **PRAYER**

*Though this world grows dark and desperate, I will not lose hope. My hope and trust are in You, the almighty, ever living God. May the truth and reality of Your power and faithfulness ever ring afresh in my heart.*

\*LISTEN to *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*



*T*he First Nowell  
Traditional, 17th Century

*The first Nowell the angels did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.*

*Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
Born is the King of Israel!*

*They looked up and saw a star  
Shining in the east beyond them far,  
And to the earth it gave great light,  
And so it continued both day and night.*

*And by the light of that same star,  
Three wise men came from country far;  
To seek for a king was their intent  
And to follow the star wherever it went*

*This star drew nigh to the northwest;  
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
And there it did both stop and stay,  
Right over the place where Jesus lay.*

*Then entered in those wise men three  
Full reverently upon their knee  
And offered there in his presence  
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense*

*Then let us all with one accord  
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord;  
That hath made heaven and earth of naught  
And with his blood mankind hath bought.*

Everyone has heard the word *nowell* (or *noel* as it is now commonly spelled) in carols, seen it on store windows, and found it adorning Christmas cards. It has become such an overused term that we risk forgetting just what it means. Here the carolist holds up his hand. "Stop!" he seems to shout. "Time out! Pause and consider what this noel business is all about?"

The word *noel* literally means "birth." Amidst the simple story, the writer explains that the noel the angels were so excited about was that of the King of Israel.

*Noel* has also come to be synonymous with Christmas and Christmas carols (even according to the dictionary). This song really deals with all three meanings: the birth of Christ, the advent of His coming, and the music associated with it. As we celebrate the wondrous events surrounding the first noel, the writer points to its significance and calls us to lift up a new

noel, to sing together a song of praise to the one who has purchased us with His blood.

### **REFLECTION**

Music is an important way for us to express praise and worship to God. It was instituted by Him before the creation of the earth and is referred to some 839 times in the Bible. The Psalms, for instance, continually exhort us to “praise the Lord in song.” As you read the following verses, ask the Lord to give you a new song (noel) with which to honor Him.

#### **Psalms 33:1-3**

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous;  
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.  
Praise the Lord with the harp;  
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.  
Sing to him a new song;  
play skillfully, and shout for joy.

#### **Psalms 40:3**

He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear the Lord  
and put their trust in him.

#### **Psalms 96:1-2**

Sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.

#### **Ephesians 5:19-20**

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always

giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**PRAYER**

*Hear, O Lord, the song of praise that rises from the depths of my being. It wells up from the joy in my heart and flows like a fountain, bubbling up over my lips. Receive this song as a token of my love, a sign of my admiration for You. May it be pleasing to Your ears. May it bring a smile to Your glorious face.*

\*LISTEN to *The First Noel*

**Little One Sweet**

Samuel Scheidt, 1650

*O Little One sweet, O Little One mild,  
Thy Father's purpose thou hast fulfilled;  
Thou cam'st from heaven to mortal ken,  
Equal to be with us poor men.*

*O Little One sweet, O Little One mild,  
With joy thou hast the whole world filled;  
Thou comest here from heaven's domain,  
To bring men comfort in their pain.*

*O Little One sweet, O Little One mild,  
In thee Love's beauties are all distilled;  
Then light in us thy love's bright flame,  
That we may give thee back the same.*

*O Little One sweet, O Little One mild,  
Help us to do as thou has willed.*



*Lo, all we have belongs to thee!  
Ah, keep us in our fealty!*

What contrasts this carol brings to light! In each stanza it rightly deems Jesus the sweet mild babe yet tells of the incredible feats He will accomplish as a man. On that first Christmas morning, who could have foreseen all that the tiny Child in the manger would eventually fulfill? The author explains that Jesus faithfully served the Father's sovereign plan. He filled the world with joy and comforted those who were suffering under great affliction by bringing heaven down to earth.

Jesus came to proclaim and demonstrate the kingdom of God. Wherever He went He preached the Good News and freed those in bondage. He asks us to do the same, fulfilling the Father's purpose. We are to be His hands, reaching out to those in need. We are to be His feet, seeking out the lost and hurting. We are to be His mouth, speaking God's message of love to those who so desperately need to hear it.

If we hope to attain to such a high calling, we must call out to Jesus. Only by His grace and power will we ever remain faithful to that precious duty (fealty). As we listen to His call to action and look to the broken world, we can only cry out with the carol writer, "Ah, keep us in our fealty!"

### **REFLECTION**

Jesus' ministry didn't end with His ascension into heaven. It continues today through everyone in whom the Spirit of God dwells. As you consider the passages listed below, petition the Lord for a greater revelation of the calling He has placed upon your life.

**Luke 4:18-19**

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the  
prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

### **John 14:12**

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

### **Mark 16:17-18**

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

### **PRAYER**

*Jesus, impart to me the bright flame of Your love, that I may function as Your humble servant. Fill me with Your Spirit, that I may attend to those in need. May Your life so flow through me that Your ministry would be displayed in my feeble hands, feet, and mouth. May You receive the glory as I go forth in response to Your call to touch the lost, the poor, the sick, and the dying.*

\*LISTEN to *O Little One Sweet*



**F**rom Heaven Above  
Martin Luther, 1535

*From heaven above to earth I come  
To bear good news to every home;  
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,  
Whereof I now will say and sing:*

*“To you this night is born a Child  
Of Mary, chosen mother mild;  
This little Child of lowly birth  
Shall be the joy of all the earth.*

*“Tis Christ, our God, who far on high  
Hath heard your sad and bitter cry;  
Himself will your salvation be,  
Himself from sin will make you free.”*

*Welcome to earth, Thou noble guest,  
Through whom e'en wicked men are blest!*

*Thou comest to share our misery;  
What can we render, Lord, to Thee?*

*Ah, dearest Jesus, Holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Within my heart that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee!*

*Glory to God in highest heaven,  
Who unto men His Son hath given,  
While angels sing with pious mirth  
A glad new year to all the earth.*

We often wonder how we can please God. What can we do to satisfy Him? Spend more time in prayer? Study the Bible more often? Attend more church functions? While there is nothing wrong with these activities, they miss the point. God isn't interested in our performance.

In this carol, Luther reminds us of God's true priorities, those things which bring Him pleasure. First, He is delighted when we believe in Jesus. "Himself will your salvation be, Himself from sin will make you free." By acknowledging those truths, we make the Father happy.

After choosing to believe in His Son, the Lord asks us to receive Him. Jesus is more than just a historical fact. Because He rose from the dead and lives today, He is a present reality, someone to know and be known by. When we welcome His Son into our life, it gives the Father great satisfaction.

God is jealous for our hearts. This is what He has been after all along. In sending Jesus He set about wooing us, drawing us by His love in hopes of gaining our hearts. When

our “quiet chamber” becomes His possession and He is allowed to take up residence there, He is well pleased.

Finally, after turning our hearts over to God, we are released to worship Him. Our praise arises out of love for Him rather than from religious bondage. We can then rejoice with Luther in singing “Glory to God in highest heaven, Who unto men His Son hath given.”

### **REFLECTION**

Serving God out of love rather than performing for or earning His approval is an ongoing challenge. Each day we must examine our hearts to determine our motivations. Are we becoming like the Pharisees, bound by laws but distant from God? Ask the Lord to reveal your heart as you read His Word.

#### **Isaiah 29:13**

The Lord says:

“These people come near to me with their  
mouth

and honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

Their worship of me

is based on merely human rules they have  
been taught.

#### **Romans 3:20**

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

#### **Romans 3:21-24**

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has

been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

### **Ephesians 2:8**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...

### **Hebrews 13:15**

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

### **PRAYER**

*Father, my one desire is to please You. To that end, I welcome Your Son, Jesus, into my heart, so that it may ever be Your possession. Come, Lord, take Your rest in the quiet chamber I have kept for You.*

\*LISTEN to *From Heaven Above*



**O** Come, O Come, Emmanuel  
Latin, 9th Century

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.*

*Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

*O come, o come, Thou Lord of Might,  
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height  
In ancient times didst give the law  
In cloud and majesty, and awe.*

*O come, Thy Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell Thy people save  
And give them victory o'er the grave.*

*O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.*

*O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.*

Each name of God embodies and represents some part of the glory of the Unseen One. In this old Latin carol, the writer employs a number of names to help us see the Unseen One. Each of the lyrical appellations reflects a piece of His glory, describing for us the character and nature of Jesus. They paint a portrait of His accomplishments, authority, and power.

Emmanuel – God with us. What image does that bring to mind? Imagine the Creator of the universe choosing to take on human flesh and walk among us. The Lord of Might – the awesome God who could not even be approached in ancient days, coming to draw us into His arms. Rod of Jesse – the meek, compassionate Son of God triumphs over the enemy, conquers death, and becomes a banner of life for the people. Dayspring – the Light pierces the gloom, shattering the darkness and bringing hope to those in despair. Key of David – the King opens wide the door to life and leads His subjects through to freedom.

When we comprehend the rich meaning of the titles set forth in this song, it is transformed from a simple Christmas carol into a powerful vehicle of praise and a heartfelt prayer of anticipation.



**REFLECTION**

By studying the names of Jesus, we learn more about Him and are better able to worship Him. After all, we cannot worship that which we do not know. As you look at these references, ask yourself two questions: *Who* is this Jesus? *Why* did He come? Afterwards, you may find it beneficial to write your answers next to each reference.

**Isaiah 7:14**

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

**Isaiah 9:6**

For to us a child is born,  
     to us a son is given,  
     and the government will be on his  
 shoulders.  
 And he will be called  
     Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
     Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**Isaiah 11:1-2**

A shoot will come up from the stump of  
 Jesse;  
     from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.  
 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
     the Spirit of wisdom and of  
 understanding,  
     the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
     the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—

**Luke 1:78-79**

“Through the tender mercy of our God,  
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;  
To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow  
of death,  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

**Revelation 1:8**

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

**Revelation 3:7**

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, “These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens...”

**PRAYER**

*Come now, Unseen One. Reveal to me the wonder of Your character, the splendor of Your nature, and the greatness of Your name. I want to know You.*

\*LISTEN TO O COME, O Come Emmanuel



**C**hildren's Song of the Nativity  
Frances Chesterton

*How far is it to Bethlehem?  
Not very far.  
Shall we find the stable-room  
Lit by a star?  
Can we see the little child,  
Is he within?  
If we lift the wooden latch  
May we go in?*

*May we stoke the creatures there,  
Ox, ass, or sheep?  
May we peep like them and see  
Jesus asleep?  
If we touch his tiny hand  
Will he awake?  
Will he know we've come so far  
Just for his sake?*

*Great kings have precious gifts,  
And we have naught,  
Little smiles and little tears  
Are all we brought.  
For all weary children  
Mary must weep.  
Here, on his bed of straw  
Sleep, children sleep.*

*God in his mother's arms,  
Babes in the byre,  
Sleep, as they sleep who find  
Their heart's desire*

There is such freshness in this story of the nativity. Imagine, if you will, asks Chesterton, children hearing about the birth of a Savior King. Perhaps they overheard a few shepherds excitedly discussing the event. Maybe they even saw the angels proclaiming it. However the news was passed to them, they have decided to see for themselves just what all the fuss is about. You can almost see this group of youngsters timidly entering the stable, a sense of wonder filling their hearts.

Whether or not a collection of children actually sought out the Lord at his birth, their saga is representative of us today. As Jesus said, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." How do we change? How do we become like children? This song helps answer those questions.

Notice the language the writer uses – shall we find? can we see? may we peep? will He know? Such childlike phrases – always asking, always curious, ever seeking. These young ones

seem quite aware that they have no right to be there. They realize that they bring no great gifts, only tears and smiles. Yet they enter in, hoping to see Him and share His bed of straw. Isn't this just how Jesus asks us to approach Him – in humility, innocence, and awe? Such is the worship that He esteems.

### REFLECTION

Throughout Scripture, God refers to us as children. Whose children we are and whether we act childish or child-like is a choice that is left up to us. The following passage describes what it means to live as children of God.

#### **Ephesians 4:17-18**

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...

#### **Ephesians 4:22-29**

...That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying, "*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*" for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

**Ephesians 4:31-32**

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

**Ephesians 5:1-2**

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

**PRAYER**

*Ask God to empower you to live as His child, ever seeking after Him with a pure heart. Invite His Spirit to root out childishness and all of its selfish manifestations. Commit yourself to serve Him humbly in childlike reverence. Ask Him to bear the fruit of light in you – goodness, righteousness, and truth.*

\*LISTEN to *Children's Song of the Nativity*



**O** Come, All Ye Faithful  
Latin, 18th Century

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels!*

*O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!*

*The brightness of glory, Light of light eternal,  
Our lowly nature He hath not abhorred:  
Son of the Father, Word of God incarnate!*

*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!  
Glory to God, glory in the highest!*

*Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy  
morning;  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!*

In sending Jesus to earth, the Father set out to establish a new covenant with humankind. Through the shed blood of His Son, God established a new and living way for us to fellowship with Him. Instead of offering bulls and sheep on an ancient altar, we have only to call on the name of Jesus and rely on the blood He shed for us to enter into the very presence of Almighty God.

When God made covenants with individuals in the Old Testament, He often changed their name. Abram (exalted father) became Abraham (father of a multitude), Jacob (supplanter) became Israel (prince with God). In each case their name was changed to reflect their change of character and their new relationship with God. We of the new covenant in Jesus have also gained a new identity. Having been “born again” by the Spirit, we are transformed from sinners to saints, from disobedient rebels to faithful followers of God. We who were once far off are drawn near His throne of grace as sons and daughters.

The Father’s heart, as expressed in this song, cries out to us: “Come, faithful ones. Come, you joyful and triumphant ones. Come and look upon the King of angels. Behold the brightness of His glory, the light of His eternal fire. Come, come, you who have become my children, and give glory to My Son.”

Our response, found in the final stanza and the refrain, is



to gladly welcome Him and lift up a chorus of joyous praise and adoration.

### REFLECTION

To adore literally means to “put the mouth to, or kiss, in worship.” In past centuries, adoration was expressed to dignitaries and rulers by bowing and kissing their ring or feet. We find the same activity spoken of in the Bible. The Greek word for worship, *proskunco* (see John 4:23-24), is defined as giving reverence by turning towards and kissing. It implies a humble attitude or posture, a total focus on the object of worship, and a special intimacy. With that in mind, allow these verses to spur you toward adoring Him.

#### **Psalm 99:5**

Exalt the Lord our God,  
And worship at His footstool—  
He *is* holy.

#### **1 Chronicles 16:27-29**

Honor and majesty *are* before Him;  
Strength and gladness are in His place.  
Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,  
Give to the Lord glory and strength.  
Give to the Lord the glory *due* His name;  
Bring an offering, and come before Him.  
Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of  
holiness!

#### **Psalm 95:6-7**

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.  
For He *is* our God,  
And we *are* the people of His pasture,

And the sheep of His hand.

### **PRAYER**

*Worshiping You is such a privilege, Lord. To look into Your eyes, to tell You how much I love You, to kiss Your face... Though I am unworthy to enjoy such intimacy with a holy God, I come boldly, confidently before Your throne by the blood of Your Son. Allow me to bask here in Your presence while I make my adoration for You known.*

*\*LISTEN TO O COME, All Ye Faithful*



**W**e Would See Jesus  
J. Edgar Park, 1913

*We would see Jesus; lo! His star is shining  
Above the stable while the angels sing;  
There in a manger on the hay reclining,  
Haste, let us lay our gifts before the King.*

*We would see Jesus, Mary's Son most holy,  
Light of the village life from day to day,  
Shining revealed through every task most lowly,  
The Christ of God, the Life, the Truth, the Way.*

*We would see Jesus on the mountain teaching,  
With all the listening people gathered round;  
While birds and flowers and sky above are preaching  
The blessedness which simple trust has found.*

*We would see Jesus; in the early morning,  
Still as of old he calleth, "Follow Me";*

*Let us arise, all meaner service scorning;  
Lord, we are Thine, we give ourselves to Thee.*

This carol expresses the deep yearning of all who hunger for God. Its repeating first line is the heart cry of those who seek after truth. The phrase “we would see Jesus” finds its origin in the Gospel of John. According to the apostle’s account, a group of Greeks had journeyed to Jerusalem in order to worship. These fellows approached Philip, one of the disciples, and made a request: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

Seeing Jesus should be our primary goal in worship. As Judson Cornwall once wrote, “worship without an awareness of Christ is impossible... For to behold Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to worship him.” Singing, praying, serving, and even living are meaningless if we fail to recognize Jesus as our source, the cause and object of our devotion. To look up into His radiant face and gaze into His merciful eyes is to know love beyond compare.

## REFLECTION

The Greeks who sought Jesus wanted to physically see Him. Unfortunately, until His appearing, we will not be afforded that opportunity. We can however, look upon Him with spiritual eyes. The following verses speak about how this supernatural sight can be honed.

### Desire

One *thing* I have desired of the Lord,  
That will I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
All the days of my life,  
To behold the beauty of the Lord,  
And to inquire in His temple.

Psalm 27:4

**Initiative**

Unto You I lift up my eyes,  
 O You who dwell in the heavens.  
 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the  
 hand of their masters,  
 As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her  
 mistress,  
 So our eyes *look* to the Lord our God,  
 Until He has mercy on us.

Psalm 123:1-2

**Persistence**

My eyes *are* ever toward the Lord,  
 For He shall pluck my feet out of the net.

Psalm 25:15

But my eyes *are* upon You, O God the Lord;  
 In You I take refuge;  
 Do not leave my soul destitute.

Psalm 141:8

**PRAYER**

*Father, this song reflects my deepest prayer: that I may clearly see Your Son. Purify my heart and restore sight to my blind eyes. Let me know see Him, know Him, and love Him. Like the psalmist, I fix my gaze on Jesus, the focus of my worship. As I humbly follow after Him, let others see Jesus in me.*

\*LISTEN to *We Would See Jesus*



*H*ark! **The Herald Angels Sing**  
Charles Wesley, 1739

*Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!”  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With th’ angelic host proclaim,  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”*

*Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Christ, by highest heaven adored;  
Christ, the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;*

*Hail th' incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.*

*Hail, the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings  
Ris'n with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.*

It is obvious that the author of this song had a keen appreciation and understanding of God and His purposes. Hymn writer Charles Wesley offers us a study on the names of Jesus and the mystery of His incarnation. King, Lord, Emmanuel, Prince of Peace, Sun of Righteousness... all these names find their origin in Scripture and reflect a facet of the Savior's character and position.

Who is this Jesus and why did He come? Wesley answers these questions with vivid word pictures. In the first stanza he announces that Jesus came to reconcile God to mankind. No more would sin divide the two. In the next stanza, he describes Jesus as the fullness of the Godhead veiled in flesh, the "incarnate Deity." In the final verses, he explains that Jesus brought with Him light, life, and healing, as well as an end to death. This powerful message is good reason for us to give "glory to the newborn King."

### REFLECTION

Read through the Scriptures below and then reread the words to Wesley's song.

**Colossians 1:15-22**

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...

**PRAYER**

*"Hail" means to welcome or greet with cheers and acclaim. That is how I respond to You this day, Jesus. I hail You, Prince of Peace, Sun of Righteousness! Bestow upon me Your light, life, and healing, as I bow and give glory to Your name.*

LISTEN TO *HARK! The Herald Angels Sing*





**C**hristmas Hymn  
Amy Grant, 1983

*Praise to God whose love was shown,  
Who sent his Son to earth.  
Jesus left his rightful throne  
Became a man by birth.*

*The virgin's baby son,  
All creation praised;  
God incarnate come,  
Come to Bethlehem.*

*Still a higher call had He,  
Deliverance from our sins –  
Come to set all people free  
From Satan's hold within.*

*For by the sin of man we fell;  
By the Son of God*

*He crushed the power of hell –  
Death we fear no more.*

*Now we stand with strength, with power,  
The sons of God on earth,  
Faithful to the final hour,  
Christ's righteousness our worth.*

*And now all praise is given  
For the babe, the Son,  
The Savior King is risen,  
Christ is Lord indeed.*

This contemporary Christmas hymn is a powerful declaration of faith. Grant invites us to join her in professing what we believe. Each verse adds to the last until the foundations of faith have been laid.

The first two verses answer the why of Jesus' birth: because of God's love. The next two deal with the why of His mission: to deliver us from sin, death, hell, and the devil. The fifth verse is a triumphant proclamation of our standing in Christ: sons and daughters of God in righteousness. The final verse is the necessary call for praise to be lifted up to the One who lived, died, and rose again.

Consider the power, freedom, and joy which now belongs to those who hope in the living God. Speak the lyrics aloud. Let them become a statement of what you know to be true. Take courage from them, and allow them to increase your faith.

## **REFLECTION**

One day in the not too distant future, God's people will

stand before His throne and sing together endless songs of praise. Grant's song may even be among those wafting through heaven for all eternity. In any case, the Bible gives us a glimpse of what that day will be like.

### **Revelation 5:6-13**

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,  
because you were slain, and with your blood you  
purchased for God  
persons from every tribe and language and people and  
nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve  
our God,

and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels,  
numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand  
times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living  
creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and  
under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them,  
saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise  
and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!”

### **PRAYER**

*Father, how I look forward to the wondrous celebration that will take place before Your throne. Yet I cannot put off my desire to express praise to You. I must begin my song now. Unto You and to the Lamb, I lift all praise, honor, glory, and power, for ever and ever!*

\*LISTEN to *Christmas Hymn*



**J**oy to the World!  
Isaac Watts, 1719

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love.*

In this carol, based loosely on Psalm 98, the great hymn writer, Isaac Watts captures the spirit of celebration that

Christmas should evoke in all of us. The Lord of the universe has come, and He has set us free. Where once sin, death, and the devil reigned, Jesus now reigns. We certainly have cause to celebrate. At Watts' urging, let's break out the instruments, lift up a song, and praise God by dancing and making a joyful noise.

### REFLECTION

Celebration is one of the major themes of the Psalms. In the Psalms, we find many patterns for rejoicing before God. As you read these examples, ask the Lord to release you to make a joyful noise to Him. Then "just do it!"

#### **Psalm 98:1**

Sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things;  
his right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him.  
The Lord has made his salvation known  
and revealed his righteousness to the  
nations.  
He has remembered his love  
and his faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.  
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music;  
make music to the Lord with the harp,  
with the harp and the sound of singing,  
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's  
horn—  
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

#### **Psalm 150**

Praise the Lord.  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
    praise him in his mighty heavens.  
Praise him for his acts of power;  
    praise him for his surpassing greatness.  
Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,  
    praise him with the harp and lyre,  
praise him with timbrel and dancing,  
    praise him with the strings and pipe,  
praise him with the clash of cymbals,  
    praise him with resounding cymbals.  
Let everything that has breath praise the  
Lord.  
Praise the Lord.

### **PRAYER**

*Jesus, You have made me glad. Your coming has given me reason to rejoice. I joyfully declare that You are King. Prepare my heart to receive all that You are and have for me. Come and take up residence there.*

\*LISTEN to *Joy to the World*



*H*ow Lovely Shines the Morning Star  
 Philipp Nicolai, 1597

*How lovely shines the Morning Star!  
 The nations see and hail afar  
 The light in Judah shining.  
 Thou David's Son of Jacob's race,  
 My Bridegroom and my King of Grace,  
 For Thee my heart is pining.  
 Lowly, holy, great and glorious,  
 Thou victorious Prince of graces,  
 Filling all the heavenly places.*

*O highest joy by mortals won,  
 True Son of God and Mary's Son,  
 Thou high-born King of ages!  
 Thou art my heart's most beautiful Flower,  
 And Thy blest gospel's saving power  
 My raptured soul engages.*



*Thou mine, I Thine; Sing Hosanna!  
Heavenly manna, tasting, eating,  
Whilst Thy love in songs repeating.*

*A pledge of peace from God I see  
When Thy pure eyes are turned to me  
To show me thy good pleasure.  
Jesus, Thy Spirit and Thy Word,  
Thy body and Thy blood afford  
My soul its dearest treasure.  
Keep me kindly in Thy favor,  
O my Savior! Thou wilt cheer me;  
Thy Word calls me to draw near Thee.*

*Oh, joy to know that Thou, my Friend,  
Art Lord, Beginning without end,  
The First and Last, Eternal!  
And Thou at length, O glorious grace,  
Wilt take me to that holy place,  
The home of joys supernal.  
Amen, Amen! Come and meet me!  
Quickly greet me! With deep yearning,  
Lord, I look for Thy returning.*

What a powerful anthem of praise! Had it not been set to music, this poem by Philipp Nicolai would still remain a stirring and worthy tribute to the Lord. Its striking imagery, rich theological themes, and skillful use of Christ's titles make it a classic hymn.

Think of it as a sumptuous feast – filled with spiritual appetizers, entrees, side dishes, and desserts. To rush through it would be an insult to chef Nicolai. Take time to savor it.

Read it carefully, consider the theme, and make notes about those lines and phrases the Lord impresses upon you. Written in first person, it also lends itself to reading aloud as a prayer of praise.

### **REFLECTION**

It is amazing how wonderfully complex Jesus is. The God/Man, fully God, fully man... such mysteries are too much for our finite minds to fully grasp. Even the most creative artists and musicians have a difficult time communicating all that He is. The following verses show us just how incredible, how awesome this Jesus is. As you read them, ask the Lord to expand your understanding and reveal the truth and reality of His character to you.

#### **John 1:1-5**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

#### **Ephesians 1:19-23**

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

**Hebrews 1:1-4**

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

**Revelation 1:12-18**

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

**PRAYER**

*When I comprehend even the smallest fragment of Your greatness, Lord, I am undone. In Your presence I, like John, am suddenly aware of how weak and powerless I truly am. Today I*

*throw myself at Your feet “as dead.” For I have, in fact, died to self and sin, and been reborn. My life is now in You. Do with me as You desire.*

\*LISTEN to *How Lovely Shines the Morning Star*



*W*e Three Kings  
John Henry Hopkins, 1857

*We three kings of Orient are;  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,  
Following yonder star.*

*O star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

*Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,  
Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever, ceasing never  
Over all to reign.*

*Frankincense to offer have I;*

*Incense owns a Deity nigh;  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
Worship Him, God on high.*

*Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom:  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.*

*Glorious now behold Him arise,  
King and God and Sacrifice;  
Alleluia, alleluia!  
Earth to heav'n replies.*

In creating this popular song, John Henry Hopkins skillfully wove together swatches of Scripture, church tradition, and legend. The Bible actually tells us very little about the men who came from the East to visit the newborn Christ. It never mentions how many there were, their names, or that they were, in fact, kings. It simply calls them “magi.” Some Bible scholars believe that this term refers to a caste of Persian priest or sorcerers who were experts in astrology, divination, and the interpretation of dreams. While they could have been rulers of a sort because of their priestly offices, we have no reason to believe that they possessed great wealth.

What we do know is that these Gentiles traveled some distance, intent upon worshiping the newborn King of the Jews. With them they brought gifts of great worth. As Hopkins poetically explains, these gifts foretold who and what this Child would be. Gold prophesied of His kingship. The frankincense spoke of the purity of His life. Myrrh, a spice used to embalm the dead, predicted His coming death.

Viewed from another angle, these gifts comprise that which the Lord desires us to offer Him today. The gold symbolizes our most precious treasures, our hopes and dreams. When we give these to Jesus, we are giving Him our heart. The frankincense denotes the pleasing fragrance that arises from a life of holiness. Here we offer Him our obedience. The myrrh proclaims the fact that we have died to self and that we now lie to Christ. It means giving Him our very life.

### **REFLECTION**

Let these words aid you in preparing your gifts for the King.

#### **Luke 12:34**

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

#### **1 Peter 1:15**

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do...

#### **Luke 9:23-25**

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?"

### **PRAYER**

*I pledge my heart, my obedience, and the title deed of my life to You, Jesus. I approach you like the wise men did, intent on*

*worshiping with these gifts outstretched to You. "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).*

\*LISTEN to *We Three Kings*





*A* **ll Praise to Jesus**  
C.A. Lane, 1990

*Messengers from the heavenly sphere  
Spreading news of joy and cheer  
That to us a Child was born,  
The Lord disguised in earthly form.*

*All praise to Jesus, King of Kings,  
To You all of creation sings:  
Messiah, the Anointed one,  
Prince of Peace, God's only Son.*

*Humbly Your life here began,  
Yet with power, a sovereign plan  
To deliver men from chains,  
From devil's tempting, from death's pains.*

*On the cross Your blood was shed  
As You suffered in our stead;*

*Your love won our victory,  
Loosing bond to set us free.*

*Out of death You rose with power  
In Your resurrection hour;  
The gates of life You swung full wide  
And bid us follow You inside.*

*We who have now seen Your light  
Celebrate this holy night;  
With glad hearts we shout and sing  
Praise to You, our risen King!*

Have you ever wondered why Christmas is so widely accepted? Think about it for a moment. What other holiday is celebrated the world over by multitudes of people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds? Not Good Friday. Not Resurrection Sunday. Not Ascension Day or Pentecost. Christmas is the only day that has been transformed into a global extravaganza. Why? Because Christmas is safe.

The other “holy days” on the Christian calendar are confrontational. They straightforwardly demand that we affirm or reject a belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection, His lordship, authority, and power. But Christmas is simply the story of a Baby. Who could be offended by that? That is took place in a barn in Bethlehem and involved animals, shepherds, a star, and three mysterious guests simply adds to the magical quality of the account.

Were the real message of Christmas to break through this fairy-tale facade for even an instant, it would quickly become a most unpopular holiday. For at its center, Christmas asks two difficult questions: Who is Jesus? Why was He born? It’s one

thing to smile at the innocent Child in the nativity scene and quite another to consider that He is the only Son of God, come to reconcile us to our Creator.

Perhaps the world does recognize the true meaning of Christmas. That might explain why many people go to such great lengths to detach this holiday from the One it is intended to honor. What these poor souls fail to understand is that Christmas cannot be celebrated outside of Christ. The idea is absurd, like holding a party without inviting the guest of honor.

There's no way around it. Christmas is for, about, and finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

### **REFLECTION**

Let the following verses become your confession of faith. Use them to offer up thanks and praise to the One in whom you believe.

#### **Matthew 16:13-16**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

#### **John 14:6**

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

#### **John 11:25**

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."

### **PRAYER**

*Lord, I have seen Your light. With a glad heart I come to celebrate, shouting and singing my praise to You. Jesus, You are the King of kings. You are Messiah, the Anointed One. I bow before You, Prince of Peace. I confess that You are God's only Son. All honor and glory be unto You forever and ever. Amen.*

## A SPECIAL MESSAGE

### A SPECIAL MESSAGE

#### **For Seekers, Atheists, Agnostics, Skeptics, and Naysayers**

People who fall into the above categories are probably not going to crack the cover (or open the e-file) of a book titled, “Christ in the Carols.” But if you somehow reached this message and are still wavering on the topic of Jesus Christ – or even remain openly hostile to God and His only Son – it is not by accident.

The message God has for you involves Christmas (the birth of Christ) but has little to do with shopping, hanging lights, and decorating trees. It is infinitely more personal and confrontational – and more crucial. It goes like this:

#### **1. We have all broken God’s laws.**

If you think you’re a pretty good person and that God will grade your life on a curve, giving you a pass to heaven, you’re wrong.

According to the Bible: "...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

Have you ever told a lie? Even once? Ever used God's name as a cuss word? Ever committed murder (or hated someone – 1 John 3:15)?

If you've broken just one of God's laws on one occasion, you are guilty. Which brings us to the second and very sobering point.

### **2. The sentence for breaking God's law is death.**

The Bible says, "...The wages of sin [breaking God's law] is death..." (Romans 6:23a). When you die and face judgment, the Bible says you'll be sent to hell rather than heaven.

If that doesn't scare you, it should. Hell is described as a place of torment, a place of darkness, a place where the worm never dies... Not a fun destination for a vacation, much less a forever home.

Thankfully, there's Good News!

### **3. God offers us forgiveness in Jesus Christ.**

The Bible says, "...The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:23b).

God demonstrated His love for you like this: while you were still a sinner (a lawbreaker), Christ died for you. (Romans 5:8)

Jesus came (Christmas), lived a sinless life, died on your behalf (Good Friday), and rose again (Resurrection Sunday), victorious over sin and death. All of this so that you could be forgiven and enter into eternal life with God.

To take advantage of this amazing invitation, simply:

A. **Admit** you have broken God's laws (that you have sinned) and repent (turn away from your sin).

B. **Believe** that Jesus died on the cross for you and provides forgiveness and salvation.

C. **Confess** or declare with your mouth that "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead – and you will be saved (Romans 10:9).

If you've taken that step - congratulations! You are now a child of God and a follower of Jesus. Welcome to God's family! Next, find a good church to attend and start reading the Bible. Go here for new believer resources.





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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher and Frances Lane are part-time authors, full-time Christ followers who are convinced that Jesus is the only way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. They also know that He is coming again SOON! They live in Colorado with their three part-time well behaved, full-time smelly dogs.

The entire Lane gang wishes you a very meaningful Christmas and a blessed New Year. Maranatha!





## REVIEWS

### Reviews on Amazon

- *I just finished reading this little gem of a book. The emphasis is NOT on how the author got the idea the carol, or the circumstances surrounding the writing of it (though that is included in several of the chapters). The emphasis is on finding Christ in the carols and how these carols express so beautifully the glorious and mysterious incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ!*
- *My family used this book as an advent devotional. It is very well written and brings out deeper meanings that you may have missed in "common" Christmas carols. You are also exposed to several Christmas songs that you are unlikely to have heard before but that have solid theology.*
- *I bought this book maybe 8 or 10 years ago, and I look forward to reading it every December. I enjoy Christmas carols, and this book makes me think about the words (something I may not always do since I have had the lyrics memorized since I was a little girl) and what the words really mean, how they apply to my life.*
- *Love everything about it and it truly blesses one's heart!*
- *This is one of my go-to Advent devotional books. I keep ordering copies to give away to friends at Christmas.*
- *This little book is everything I'd hoped for...and more. We'll be*

*using this special book during the month of December, keeping Christ  
in our Christmas.*

- This is a wonderful little book! It was enlightening as far as history  
is concerned, and made great connections to the gospel. It is especially  
encouraging to read at Christmastime!*