

“Sing We Now of Christmas!”



*An Advent Devotional
Based on the Christmas Carols*
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You hear them on TV. You hear them at the mall. We sing them in church. They're the beautiful Christmas carols that gloriously add music to the greatest miracle of all – God becoming one of us in Jesus Christ. No event in human history has inspired more music than Christmas, and we are the richer for it. Therefore, one of the best ways to have a meaningful, blessed Christmas is allowing the words of the carols to invade our souls with timeless, spiritual truths. This devotion hopes to help you with this goal. There are readings for each day in Advent. Here's one suggestion: It might be even more meaningful to sing the carol that we're reflecting upon, even just the first verse as a family or by yourself. Let's sing of Christmas, the Good News of great joy!

Sunday, November 28

The Candle of Hope

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

In the Psalms David cried out to God many times. His basic prayer was, “*God, do something!*” “*Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink, deliver me . . . answer me . . . Come near and rescue me!*” (Ps. 69). In Ps. 31 he wrote, “*O Lord, I have come to you for protection; don't let me be put to shame. Rescue me, for you always do what is right. Bend down and listen to me; rescue me quickly. Be for me a great rock of safety.*” We've all been there. “*God, I need You to do something!*”

In Jesus of Bethlehem God did something. God did something wonderfully awesome and graciously life-altering. God came to us. That's why Jesus was given the title, “*Emmanuel,*” “*God with us.*”

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear! Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

Prayer: Thank You for coming to us, dear Jesus. Thank You for teaching us that we are never alone. For You are Emmanuel! Come to us again this Advent in new and surprising ways. Amen.

Monday, November 29

O Come, Thou Dayspring

*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.*

The arrival of Jesus Christ was a “Dayspring,” the beginning of a new day, a new era, a new age. Mary used the word in her magnificent “Magnificat”: “Through the tender mercy of our God with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us” (Luke 1:78, NKJV). Mary saw and believed that her baby, the Messiah, was ushering in a new age in God’s relationship with humanity. And indeed He did. The Dayspring has come, the dawn of a new day is here!

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, for ushering in this new day, filled with heaven’s light and love. Help me to live as if the Dayspring has begun. Amen.



Tuesday, November 30

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

My prayer this Advent is for Christ to reign in my heart. He comes to us as a helpless baby in a manger, but he’s the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He taught us when we pray to ask that God’s Kingdom come. When we pray that we’re actually asking for God’s Kingdom to come to earth through us, that we’re to help usher in the Kingdom! This means that devoting ourselves to God is asking God to be our King, our Sovereign, our ultimate Leader. The great preacher George Buttrick believed that “Christ is to be crowned King in the hearts of all who believe in him,” and that, “this coronation takes place among confession, and tears, and great laughter.”

*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.*

Prayer: This Advent, dear Lord, be our King. Be the King of our hearts and lives. And let your Kingdom come through us. Amen. May it be so.

Wednesday, December 1

The hopes and fears of all the years.

The year was 1865 when a former resident of North Andover, Phillips Brooks took a sabbatical trip to the holy land. It had been an awful year back home. The anguish of the Civil War was finally over, but just as it ended President Lincoln was assassinated. The loss shook the nation, including Brooks, now an Episcopal priest serving in Philadelphia. On Christmas Eve Brooks rode on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. He even rode out to the fields where it’s said the shepherds received the angels’ visit. Brooks’ journey to Bethlehem inspired, *O Little Town of Bethlehem.*”

*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 darkstreets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.*

When I was a young man I wondered about that last line. It didn't seem to fit with the rest of the carol. But now having served as a pastor for many years I've seen that Christmas often brings back the *hopes and fears of all the years*, especially the year we're just finishing up. Our losses can become more poignant, our heartaches deeper this time of year. That's why I once wrote a humble little song with the line, *"If you can't have a Merry Christmas, have a holy Christmas."* We can still go to Bethlehem in our hearts and see what God has done, even while feeling the dashed hopes and fears of the past year. Phillips Brooks didn't end his song with this line. He kept reflecting on Christmas. And so must we.

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to be honest with my feelings and to feel what I must feel. May this Christmas be a time of healing and hope. And if it can't be a "merry" time for me, help it to be a holy time with You. Amen.



Thursday, December 2

Hear the Angels Sing

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" was written by Edmund H. Sears, pastor of the Unitarian Society of Wayland, MA. It was written in 1849 but its words and mood resonate today (a reminder that we're not the first people in the world to feel stress & anxiety). Sears asks us to listen this Christmas for the message and song of the angels.

*And 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.
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!*

Prayer: Help us, dear Lord, in this busy season to find enough quiet and rest so that we might hear the angels sing of your love for us. Amen.

Friday, December 3

For lo, the days are hastening on

The word "advent" means, "arrival," "coming." It's the season when we're to think not only of Jesus' first advent, but we're also to consider his second advent. The New Testament mentions the return of Christ over 300 times. Out of the 27 books of the NT, 23 speak of his return. Some of our Christmas carols do as well.

*For lo! The days are hastening on, by prophet 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 send back the song which now the angels sing.*

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the promise of your return when your Kingdom will come in all its fullness. Help us to work for your Kingdom now with the assurance of its final arrival when heaven and earth become one, and peace shall reign over all the earth! Amen.

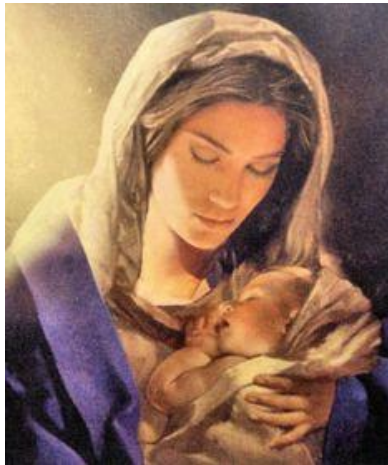
Saturday, December 4

A long-forgotten verse

In studying the carols I've discovered that most carols evolved through the years. A verse or two were added or subtracted, a new tune replaced an older one, and so on. Such is the case with, "*It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.*" Pastor Edmund H. Sears of Wayland, MA, was discouraged the Christmas he wrote it, discouraged that the teachings of Christ were not being embraced and lived out more fully. Humanity seemed bent in the opposite direction. So he expressed his feelings to challenge his congregation to live out the teachings of Christ. Here's the verse that's not found in most hymnals today:

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strained have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not the love song they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing!*

Prayer: Help us, Holy God, to live lives that honor and embrace the teachings of the Prince of Peace. Amen.



Sunday, December 5

The Candle of Peace

It's a beautiful picture isn't it?

*Round yon virgin, mother and child. Holy infant so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.*

It's one of the most precious sights in the world – a mother cradling her newborn child, who is sound asleep in her loving, grateful arms. Picture that first Christmas. Mary has recovered some from giving birth. The cord has been cut. Jesus, now wrapped in bands of cloth is sound asleep in Mary's arms. The Prince of Peace has come to earth and he is sleeping in heavenly peace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give us your peace. Amen.

A suggestion for a bedtime prayer. How about trying to pray yourself to sleep tonight? One way to do this is to go down the alphabet and thank God for something beginning with each letter. "God, I thank you for angels (or Alisa or Albany, NY). Then go to "B," and so forth. The goal? To sleep in heavenly peace.

Monday, December 6

God and sinners reconciled

*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled."*

The peace that Christ brings is reconciliation, the reuniting of God and humanity. Paul taught this truth to the Corinthians:

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." (II Cor. 5:19)

In Christian belief, Jesus Christ is the perfect one to reconcile God and human beings because he is fully God and fully human. As Paul told the Ephesians, "*Christ himself is our peace*" (Eph. 2:14). God went to great lengths to achieve this reconciliation – Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Calvary, Easter. God felt we were worth it. For God is a God of love and relationship. So God's heart had no other choice but to seek reconciliation with others. Love reaches out. It can do no other.

Prayer: Thank You, Loving God, for your reconciling heart and actions. I receive your reconciliation through the love and grace of Christ. Thank You! Amen.

Tuesday, December 7

God and sinners reconciled, II

My first church in Pennsylvania had a Lutheran Church right across the street. The two churches jointly owned a piece of land (dating back to the time when the two congregations shared the same building). We spent quite a bit of time one year trying to iron out a land swap. I negotiated hard for our interests, and their pastor, also right out of seminary, fought hard in representing his congregation. The result – hard feelings on both sides. Several months later, Bill & I were carrying out our tradition of showing each other our sanctuaries once they were all decorated for Christmas. As I showed him ours I brought up the negotiations, apologized and said I regretted that it had affected our friendship. Then I apologized again for bringing up the subject at such a busy time of year. Bill said words I've never forgotten. He said, "It's the perfect time. It's the season of reconciliation."

"For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation." II Cor. 5:19

Prayer: God of reconciliation, give us moments this Christmas to mend fences, build bridges and experience your grace. Amen.

Wednesday, December 8

Singing Imperfection

Carols, like people, aren't perfect. They occasionally take some poetic license and sometimes they make outright mistakes. An example of poetic license is, "*In the Bleak Midwinter*" – "snow is falling, snow on snow." The Bible never tells us the time of year (and never mentions snow – Joseph & Mary were definitely not dreaming of a White Christmas). Since the shepherds had their sheep out in the fields at night, it probably was not winter. Christmas came to be held in late December to replace the ancient, "The Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," celebrating the lengthening of days, as more light was coming into the world. Christians celebrating the arrival of the Light of the World, the "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2), seemed like a fitting replacement.

The most egregious error in the carols is, "*We Three Kings.*" Magi (the term used in Matthew 2) were not kings. They were advisors to the kings - well-educated astrologers, who believed that God spoke to humanity through the stars of the heavens. And as you probably know, the Bible never says there were three Wise Men. It simply says they brought three gifts. My theory has always been that there were probably four Wise Men, and one forgot his gift. After all, they were guys. "*I can't believe I left it on the kitchen table!*"

Prayer: Holy God, when it comes to following You, help me avoid egregious mistakes and to always remember what's really important. In your Holy Name. Amen.

Thursday, December 9

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Of the Father's Love Begotten is one of our oldest carols. Its melody (a medieval plainchant) dates to the 10th Century. Its words are even older (written by a Christian Roman poet, Aurelius Prudentius Clemens, born in 348 AD). It speaks of a truth that is even older - Christmas was God's idea. Christmas came from the heart of God. In fact, one translation of this carol reads, "*Of the Father's Heart Begotten.*"

St John put it this way: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16).

For God so loved the world . . . that God reached out to us in Jesus Christ. Love could do no other.

Question: How has God reached out to you? Look for God's unexpected blessings this Christmas. If God could show up in little old Bethlehem, God could show up anywhere!

Prayer: Visit us again this Christmas, dear Jesus. Amen.



Friday, December 10

Away in a Manger

I love *Away in a Manger*. What a beautiful, simple lullaby, so fitting to sing as we celebrate a baby's birth. I used to be annoyed at this line, "*But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes,*" as if it was saying that Jesus never cried. Of course he cried. Once I had children I realized that the carol captures the indescribable moment when a newborn baby falls quietly asleep, often in his or her mother's arms. Is there anything more beautiful in the world than that? Even in a stable with the baby placed in a feeding trough, it was a moment like no other.

The carol also reminds us of Jesus' love for children. No other religious figure from the ancient world ever spoke so highly of children. "*Let the little children come to me, for to such belong the kingdom of God,*" and "*Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them.*" So the carol ends, "*Bless all the dear children in thy tender care.*"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me a childlike faith this Christmas. In your Holy Name. Amen.

Saturday, December 11

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

This is a lesser-known carol. I like it partly because it's in a minor key. For me this adds to the mystery of Christmas, when the God of all creation entered human history as the baby in Bethlehem. What do we do with mystery? It's beyond our explanations and our reasoning. So we must ponder and be still. Mystery calls for silence.

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence and with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descended, come our homage to demand.*

The Wise Men had it right. When they greeted Joseph & Mary and saw the Newborn King they presented their gifts, knelt and worshipped him. They apparently said very little. Mystery and majesty call for quiet humility and worship-filled silence. May that be a part of your Christmas.

Prayer: Silent meditation. Suggested verse: *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14). Focus on your breath, breathing in God's Spirit, breathing out all distractions. Then repeat the verse focusing on a different word each time.



Sunday, December 12

The Candle of Joy

Joy to the World!

It's probably my favorite sentence in the entire story of Christmas. Luke 2:10-11 . . .

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Christ the Lord!"

The birth of Jesus is Good News for the world! It's good news that comes with great joy. So if we're not regularly experiencing our faith this way, as good news with great joy, then we're probably not doing it right. *"Joy to the World, the Lord is come!"* His presence brings the gift of joy to us!

It may sound trite and cliché to say that God wants us to know joy, but listen to these words of Jesus:

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full"
(John 15:11).

Prayer: Loving and Joy-filled God, it seems selfish to pray for joy, but it's your desire for us. So give us your joy deep within, a joy that overflows as we share it with others. Thank You! Amen.



Monday, December 13

Tidings of Comfort and Joy

Comfort and Joy is a phrase that comes from, “*God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.*” *Comfort and Joy* don’t always go together. You can have one without the other. For instance being on a roller coaster is not terribly comfortable, but many of us find it exhilarating. It’s joy without comfort. Christmas carols bring both, don’t they? Is there anything more joyful and comfortable than singing “*Silent Night*” and “*Joy to the World*” on Christmas Eve. All is right with the world when we sing those carols. All is indeed calm. All is truly bright. *Comfort and Joy.*

I wish for you this Christmas experiences of comfort and joy, which take you home again to your truest self and to Christ who lives within you. With Jesus Christ there is both comfort and joy. And that is why we sing.

Prayer: Thank You, Loving God, for the comfort and joy of carols, faith, prayer and love. Thank You for your love that is both exhilarating and comforting. Amen



Tuesday, December 14

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing?

This carol has a funny story behind it. The words were written by John Wesley, a prolific hymn writer and founder of the Methodist church. Wesley’s original opening line was “*Hark! How all the welkin rings, glory to the King of Kings.*” “*Welkin*” is an old English word that refers to the heavens. The great revivalist preacher George Whitefield loved Wesley’s hymn and decided to publish it. But Whitefield took some poetic license and changed the first line to, “*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.*” And he did so without even asking Wesley! Wesley was furious because of one basic reason – the Bible never says that the angels sang. Luke 2:13 says, “*A multitude of heavenly hosts praised God **saying**, ‘Glory to God in the highest!’*” It doesn’t actually say they sang. Wesley, a biblical scholar would have none of it. For the rest of his life Wesley refused to sing Whitefield’s version of his carol, even though it became widely popular.

As the late, great Paul Harvey used to say, “*And now you know . . . the rest of the story.*”

Prayer: This Christmas, dear Lord, help me pay attention to the details of the story. Amen.

Wednesday, December 15

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

“*Go, Tell It on the Mountain*” is a rousing African-American spiritual. It’s remarkable in many ways. It’s based on the shepherds receiving the Good News, news that ought to be shared far and wide!

While shepherds kept their watching o’er silent flocks by night.
Behold throughout the heavens, there shone a holy light.
Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!

Think for a moment about the lives of enslaved African-Americans. They dreamt of freedom and traveling “*over the hills and everywhere.*” Just as they longed to be free, so too the Good News longs to be set free and shared far and wide. That’s what the composer of the song was feeling when he or she wrote it.

It’s also striking to me that the slaves had faith at all. After all, Christianity was the religion of their owners (now there’s a sentence that doesn’t make sense). In many ways Christianity was imposed upon them. Yet the spirituals are evidence that they absorbed this new faith through and through. Only a faith with genuine spiritual power could do that. Think about it.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me your power so I might live the Good News and share the Good News over the hills and everywhere I go. Amen.



Thursday, December 16

“I Wonder as I Wander”

*I wonder as I wander, out under the sky, how Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor ordinary people like you and like I. I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.*

*When Mary birthed Jesus, all in a cow's stall, came wise men and farmers and shepherds and all,
And high from the heavens a star's light did fall; the promise of the ages it then did recall.*

“*I Wonder as I Wander*” has been recorded by such diverse artists as Barbara Streisand, Jewel, and John Rutter. It has a lovely, almost haunting melody and an unusual backstory. In July of 1933 a folk singer and folklorist named John Jacob Niles was in the town of Murphy, North Carolina, when he happened upon a very poor, disheveled young girl with a lovely voice singing an Appalachian melody at a church fundraiser. Niles heard only a few lines of the song, but the fragment that he heard stayed with him. He utilized what he remembered in composing, “*I Wonder as I Wander.*” Hymnals tend to attribute the song to both Niles and “Traditional Appalachian melody.”

I like the idea of taking an inspirational moment and making it our own. Perhaps we can do that with the Christmas story. Perhaps some fragment of the story will strike us in a new way and inspire us to something beautiful?

Prayer: Loving God, help me hear something new in the Christmas story this year. Give me a moment of grace and inspiration that inspires me to do something beautiful for You. Amen.

Friday, December 17

God imparts to human hearts

I always think of the phrase, "Invite Jesus into your heart" as a modern, evangelical way of describing a faith commitment. It's a Billy Graham thing, isn't it? (I say that with affection & respect) But it goes back much further than that. Apparently it was a Phillips Brooks thing, too.

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n!
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 to us today.*

Our hearts as Bethlehem. What a rich, beautiful image for faith, spirituality and the indwelling of God's Spirit. St. Paul expressed this same truth: *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"* (Eph. 3:17).

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, be born in me today and every day. Amen.



Saturday, December 18

O Holy Night

Is there a better Christmas song than, "O Holy Night"? Not in my mind. It's a masterpiece of lyrical content matched perfectly with a soaring melody. It also has an unusual backstory. The year was 1847. Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure was the commissioner of wines (I'm not kidding) in a small French village. Not known for his church attendance, Placide was a bit surprised when the parish priest asked him to compose a poem for the Christmas mass. His poem, "Cantique de Noel," became the lyrics for "O Holy Night." Placide then asked his friend, Adolphe Charles Adams to put the poem to music. The song was so well-received that in just a few years it began to be sung all over France. De Roquemaure eventually left the church and joined a socialist group, angering church hierarchy. Adolphe Adams happened to be Jewish. So church leaders denounced the song and called it unfit for church services. But the French people continued to sing it, and thankfully it survived.

In 1855 a minister from Northampton, MA, John Sullivan Dwight introduced the song in the U.S. Dwight was an abolitionist and was especially drawn to these lines:

*Truly he taught us to love one another; his law is love and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother; and in his name all oppression shall cease*

The song celebrates not only the birth of Christ, but also his teachings and his call for justice and righteousness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me this Christmas to not only celebrate your birth but also to align my life more fully with your teachings. And thank You that an unlikely pair (de Roquemaure & Adams) created such a masterpiece to honor You. Amen.

Sunday, December 19

The Candle of Love The Dawn of Redeeming Grace

It's one of the most beautiful phrases from one of the most beautiful carols, "*Silent Night.*"

Radiant beams from thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace.

C.S. Lewis once said that Christianity's chief contribution to the study of God is grace, the gift of God's love. God's love is a gift, which means you don't have to earn it. You also don't have to worry about ever losing God's love, because you didn't earn it in the first place! God simply loves you. This is the Good News of Jesus. He ushered in the Age of Grace. The carol reminds us that it's "redeeming grace," unconditional love which inspires and transforms us to love as God loves. It's grace that redeems and remakes us.

Prayer: Holy God, how can we ever thank You for your amazing grace that saves and loves people like us. Help us this Christmas to remember that our worth is not based on how many cards we send out, how incredible our Christmas decorations look or how many great gifts we buy. Our worth is based on your love for us. Wow! and Amen!



Monday, December 20

Mild he lays his glory by

Think for a moment about the humility of Christmas. The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords born to two poor commoners. And of course, there's no room for them at the inn (had the innkeeper realized he was a king would there have been room?). Born in a stable, probably a cave set among a rocky hillside. No crib for a bed, just a feeding trough. Could it be more humble than that!

*Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die.
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."*

*"Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" also speaks of the humility of Christmas:
Infant holy, infant lowly, for his bed a cattle stall;
Oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the babe is Lord of all.
Swift are winging, angels singing, Noels ringing, tidings bringing;
Christ the babe is Lord of all. Christ the babe is Lord of all.*

St. Paul wrote of Christ's humility with these words: *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for your beautiful, pure humility. Teach me your ways. Amen.

Tuesday December 21 *O Come, All Ye Faithful?*

Christmas brings the issue of faith to the forefront. What do you believe about God and Jesus? How much of the Christmas accounts do you believe? The virgin birth? The star moving? Angel visitations? Many take these details literally, and many don't, believing them to be symbols pointing to spiritual truths. In my view you can choose either path, as long as you examine the signs (details) to see what direction they're pointing us in.

John Wesley used to challenge his followers to act "as if" it were true for 21 days. To pray as if God really heard our prayers. To study the Bible as if it actually contained spiritual nourishment for our souls. So sing to God as if God were truly present. Of course, that's where the carol takes us.

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

If you're looking for more faith this Christmas, maybe that's the answer? Sing your way there. Sing "as if" God is truly magnified in our praise.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as someone said to you long, long ago - we believe, help our unbelief. Give us an extra gift of faith this Christmas - faith in You and in the Gift you've given us. And give us faith in ourselves to receive this Gift and live in newness of life. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.



Wednesday, December 22

Gloria in excelsis Deo

The earliest Christmas services that we know of utilized the phrase, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. Dating back to 130 AD Christians would gather and read the story of Christ's birth. In between the readings they would sing, "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*" – "*Glory to God in the highest.*" Those words of course were the words the angels used to praise God after they had announced the Savior's birth to the shepherds. To praise God is to express our love for God. It's wanting the love within our hearts to reach the heights of heaven. "*Glory to God in the highest.*"

Prayer: This Christmas, dear Lord, receive my love, my praise, and my adoration.

Suggested song of praise to sing to God: *O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him.
O come let us adore Him. Christ the Lord!*

Thursday, December 23

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail Incarnate Deity

Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of God, God taking on human flesh and blood. As St. John writes, God's Word to us became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Perhaps you've heard this story Once there was a husband who never went to church with his wife, not even on Christmas Eve, in fact, especially not on Christmas Eve. It was all too fanciful for him, beyond belief. He sat home alone, quietly reading when suddenly a bird crashed into his living room window, startling him. Then it happened again . . . and again . . . and again. He became very concerned for the life of the bird and the longevity of his window. He tried knocking loudly on the window to scare the bird away. But that didn't work. He turned off all the lights in the house, hoping that would do the trick. It didn't. He even yelled loudly, again hoping to scare off the bird. But nothing he tried worked, and the bird just kept crashing into the window. In desperation, the man said to himself, *"If only I could become a bird. I could lead him to safety."* At just that moment the church bells rang out at the close of the Christmas Eve service that his wife was attending. It was then that he understood the meaning of Christmas. God became one of us to show us the way to abundant life and eternal life.

Prayer: Eternal God, Thank You for the Incarnation, so that we could receive your message of love and grace, of justice and discipleship. Thank You, Jesus, for showing us the Way, the Truth and the very Life of God. Amen,



Friday, December 24 *Christmas Eve, The Holiest of Nights*

In most churches *"Silent Night"* is the most important song on Christmas Eve, because it's sung during the candlelighting ceremony. The song has so many beautiful lines and phrases. Here's the third verse:

*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.*

What weighty theology is contained in this verse! Jesus is *"love's pure light."* When the heart of God wanted to send a pure beam of light and love to the world, Jesus was born. His birth was the dawn of a new age in humanity's relationship with God – *"the dawn of redeeming grace."* And the little baby in the manger – he's still the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. *"Jesus, Lord at Thy birth."* How do we comprehend such awesome spiritual truths? How do we wrap our brains around it all? Maybe we shouldn't even try. Maybe we should just be still on this silent, holy night and allow Love's Pure Light to shine down upon us again.

Prayer: Light of the World, shine down on me. Shine in my heart. Shine in my life. Shine in our world. Love's Pure Light, let me shine for You! Amen and Amen!

Saturday, December 25 *Christmas Day!*



Joy to the World!

*Joy to the World! The Lord is come; let earth receive her king.
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing;
And heaven and nature sing; and heaven and heaven and nature sing!*

How would you describe the Joy that Jesus Christ brings? It's the joy of being loved! It's the joy of knowing you're never alone! Emmanuel is with us! It's the joy of being forgiven and covered in grace! It's the joy of eternal life! It's the joy of unbridled, unconditional love! In short, it's Christmas Morning Joy, for God gave us the Perfect Gift!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Thank You for this incredible day! Thank You for your earthly life that inspires me to follow in your footsteps. Thank You for your constant presence and eternal love. Thank You for showing me and the world how much we are loved. *"Let earth receive her King."* I receive You as my King and Savior. May my life "repeat the sounding joy," a joy that You bring to us this day and always. Amen and Amen!

Merry Christmas!



*Advent 2021
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