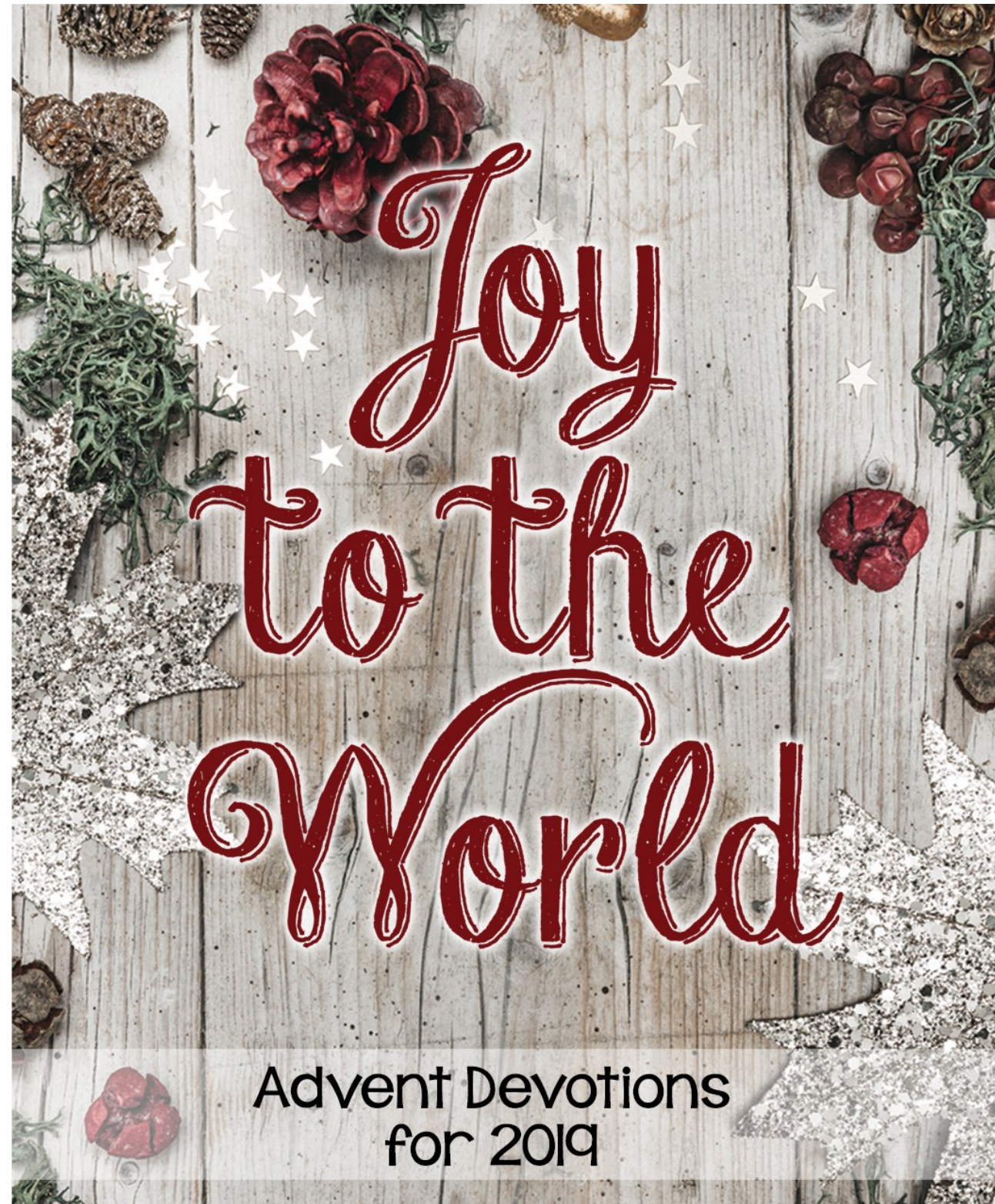




Decatur First
United Methodist

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Advent Devotions
for 2019

Advent Devotions

Advent is the beginning of the church year. It is a time of preparation—preparation for the celebration of the birth of Christ, and preparation for the return of Christ. It's a season of "already, but not yet" as we remember God's fulfilled promise to send a messiah and Jesus' pending promise to return.

During Advent 2019, our worship theme is "Let Heaven and Nature Sing." The Christmas hymn "Joy to the World" turns 300 this year. Joy is an ongoing theme in many Advent and Christmas hymns. Joy is more than happiness. Happiness is temporary and contingent on the situations in life. It's hard to be happy, for example, when we are ill. Joy is an eternal state. Joy can exist in both happiness and sadness. Joy is the deeply ingrained power of the Holy Spirit that brings us hope and peace in all situations of life. This devotional booklet will take us on a journey as we reflect on joy in our lives and the beautiful music of Advent and Christmas.

Each hymn used for reflection is found in the United Methodist Hymnal. Hymn numbers are provided if you wish to read the entire text of the hymn. Many of them will also be part of our worship services in December. Each day's devotion includes at least one verse from that hymn, although not always the first verse. Sometimes it is good to focus on those verses that may not be quite as familiar.

Written by:
Rev. Dr. Camilla Hempstead
Directing Pastor
First United Methodist Church

Hopeful Joy

December 2

Come thou Long Expected Jesus

#196

December 1

Joy to the World

#246

*“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.”*

The beloved hymn, “Joy to the World” turns 300 this year. Just imagine all the voices that have been lifted in praise in all different languages for the last 300 years!

Each Sunday this month in worship we light a candle on the Advent wreath. The first candle on our Advent wreath is the candle of hope. Hope is the positive anticipation of something yet to come. Hopeful joy is that spirit that allows us to see beyond today and its problems into the better future God has promised. Hopeful joy opens our lives so that every heart can prepare room for the Messiah. Hopeful joy calls us to celebrate God’s promises and be ready for us to receive our King. Joy to the world—the Lord has come, and will come again!

Wondrous God, you planted the hope of the messiah into the hearts of your people centuries before Jesus came to this earth. Keep alive in our hearts the hopeful joy that encourages us to wait on His return! Amen.

*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.*

Have you ever been separated from one you loved? During Jeff’s career in the Air Force, there were times when he was away for months at a time. I sometimes had to get creative to explain to the kids “how much longer until daddy comes home.” We all wanted to be back together as soon as possible. This hymn, written by Charles Wesley in 1744, wondrously communicates the human longing for the coming/return of Christ. Humanity longs for freedom from fear, freedom from sin, freedom from a hopeless, joyless existence. Humans in every nation have these same desires. The hopeful joy we mentioned yesterday is the cornerstone of this desire. The only thing that will satisfy our longing is to be reunited with Christ, hopefully when Christ comes to bring hope and peace to all the world.

Come, thou long expected Jesus. Come and bring hope, peace, and love to this broken world. Keep alive in us the joy of your presence as we wait for you. Come quickly, O long expected Jesus. Amen.

December 3 Toda la Tierra (All Earth is Waiting) #210

*All earth is waiting to see the Promised one,
And the open furrows, the sowing of the Lord.
All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true liberty;
it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.*

*In lowly stable the Promised one appeared,
Yet, feel his presence throughout the world today,
For he live in all Christians and is with us now;
again with his coming he brings us liberty.*

This hymn, written in 1972, was first included in the 1989 edition of the United Methodist Hymnal (our current edition). Originally written in Spanish, our hymnal includes both the original Spanish text and the English translation. This haunting melody seems to give the feeling of a lullaby, but also there is an urgency in its feel. In fact, the first three verses end musically in a way that anticipates something still to come. Only when we sing the final line, “again with his coming he brings us liberty” does it resolve to an end.

What is it that we are waiting for? Do we hear the cries for justice and the struggle for liberty? Are we actively searching for the truth? Yes, Christ will come again, but what are we doing in the meantime for His kingdom?

*Open our hearts, O Lord. Let us hear the cries of
our brothers and sisters who are suffering. Show us
that there ARE ways for us to make a difference in
the world today. Put our hands to work for you.
Amen.*

December 4 O Come, O Come Emmanuel #211

*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 you, O Israel.*

One of the oldest hymns in our hymnal, the text is a translation of a 9th century Latin text. The entire text (7 verses) pleads with Emmanuel (another name for the Messiah; it means “God with us”) to come soon by calling on a variety of characteristics of the Messiah, including Wisdom, Lord of Might, and Key of David. It connects us with the Israelites who longed for the promised Messiah to come. With each pleading verse, we are tempted to fall deeper and deeper into despair about the world. Yet every verse brings us joy as it ends, Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel. We can have joy. We must rejoice. God has promised Emmanuel. God’s promises are true.

*O Lord of might, who appeared to Moses and offered
him the joy of the Promised Land, Come re-ignite
your joy within us. Amen.*

December 5

Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming

#216

*O Flower, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispel with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere.
True man, yet very God,
From sin and death now save us
And share our every load*

This haunting song is not as familiar as many other Advent/Christmas songs. Part of that reason is probably because it does not lend itself to congregational singing. There is no strong beat; the tempo seems to meander in its own way. Yet the third verse (above) reminds us, as few other hymns do, of the inextricable connection between the beautiful birth of the baby Jesus and the sorrow of the death of the man Jesus. It makes us ponder the love of God who would send such a beautiful child that we would so mercilessly kill, yet God loves us through it all, saving us from sin and death, sharing our every load.

*God, you sent us your precious flower, the messiah,
and we trampled on his message and his life. Forgive
us. Bring us to the awareness of your great love, that
we may truly live as you want us to live. Amen.*

December 6

Joy In The Morning

#2284

*There'll be joy in the morning on that day,
there'll be joy in the morning on that day,
for the daylight will dawn when the darkness is gone,
there'll be joy in the morning on that day.*

Composer Natalie Sleeth wrote this beautiful hymn for the 1977 inauguration of her husband as the president of West Virginia Wesleyan College. Its title is from Psalm 30. Although the title may lead us to think it will be a happy sounding song, the melody is in a minor key, giving a feeling of unease. How like life this is! Happiness and sorrow are often intertwined. But as the lyrics remind us, there will be joy in the morning. There is no guarantee of happiness, but the joy of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit within us, will be with us morning, noon, and night.

*God of our days and nights, our mornings and
evenings, we recognize that our life is a sometimes
confusing mix of happiness and sorrow. Help us
remember that no sorrow can ever steal our joy in
you, and no happiness will ever give us more pleasure
than your joyous presence with us. Amen.*

December 7

The Friendly Beasts

#227

*Jesus, our brother, strong and good,
was humbly born in a stable rude,
and the friendly beasts around Him stood,
Jesus, our brother, strong and good.*

This unique Christmas carol builds on the centuries-old legend that the animals in the stable were given the gift of speech when Christ was born. Each verse has a different animal telling what they gave to the baby. The donkey carried his mother, the cow gave him her manger for a bed, the sheep gave him wool for a blanket, and so on. While we may or may not believe the animals actually spoke, this simple carol is a reminder that Advent/Christmas is not about getting. It is about giving of what we have to those that need it. Even the baby Jesus had needs that others had to fulfill. There are so many good places to give our time, our money, or our material goods. Like the animals, we each have something to give.

God of blessings, we get so busy making our lists of what we want that we forget what we can give. May the animals remind us that even the simple gifts we can give can be a blessing to others. Amen.

Peaceful Joy

December 8

Joy To The World

#246

*Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy*

The second Sunday in Advent we light the candle of peace. Peaceful joy. Would it really be that “peaceful” if all creation—humans and all others—were singing songs of joy? It wouldn’t be quiet, but it would be peace-filled. Peace comes when we are at ease with the world around us. Have you ever sat on your porch on a summer evening, or maybe on the beach at sunset, and just felt at ease? The problems of the world have temporarily melted away. You feel physically lighter. You wish it would last forever.

Someday it will. John the Baptist came with the message that there was one who would come to bring peace. But that peace would only come when the world was turned upside down. Christ will someday bring the peace that will last forever. When that time comes, that world will be so different from the world today. Even the fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains will sing of the joy of Christ.

*God of peace, We live in a world a violence and hate.
Yet every once in a while we get a glimpse of the peaceful joy yet to come. May we do our part we your disciples to bring a glimmer of that peace in our corner of the world. Amen.*

December 9

It Came Upon The Midnight Clear

#218

*For lo! the days are hastening 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 send back the song
Which now the angels sing.*

In 1849, Rev. Edmund Sears was serving as a part-time pastor in Massachusetts. He had recently suffered a breakdown which had forced him into a part-time position. He was living in a world that was in immense upheaval. The Mexican American War had ended in 1848. Europe was undergoing a severe economic recession which resulted in a number of revolutions. Sears wrote to a world that seemed a long way from the proclamation of the angels of “peace on earth, good will to all.”

The closing stanza of the hymn brings a message of hope to a world waiting to hear the message of peace from the angels. The days are coming when that promise of peace will be fulfilled, when the whole world will sing of peace. How do we know? Because God has promised it through the ages. This is the joy of Christ—the joy of peace yet to come.

Like the prophets of old, we hold on to the promise of peace that shall cover the earth. Keep us faithful to your promises until “the whole world sends back the song which now the angels sing”. Amen.

December 10

Good Christian Friends Rejoice

#224

*Good Christian friends, 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!
Christ was born to save!*

Before the invention of moveable type and the printing press, very few people other than trained clergy could read or write. Churches found a variety of ways to teach the scripture message to people. Worship services did little to teach as they were all conducted in Latin and the average person did not understand Latin. Stained glass windows in churches were not initially simply for beauty; they were there to teach Bible stories.

This hymn, written sometime in the 14th century, was another way the church taught the story of Christ. The three verses move from the birth of Christ to the joy of living with Christ to the promise of eternal life in Christ. Although most of us can read the scripture stories for ourselves, hearing the message sung helps us remember it even more clearly. Christian living is about more than just the birth of the Savior. It is about all that we have in Christ.

Lord God, we celebrate with heart and soul and voice because you have come to earth as Jesus the messiah in order that we might have new life here on earth and eternal life with you later. May we remember every day to share our rejoicing with the world! Amen.

*I want to see the brightness of God;
I want to look at Jesus.
Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path,
And show me the way to the Father.
In him there is no darkness at all;
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God;
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.*

Although holiday traditions change over time, one that seems to remain consistent is the tradition of looking at lights. All the variety of lights and colors bring a smile to our faces. It is amazing how something as small as bulb on a tree or wreath can poke a great hole in the darkness. When many bulbs are gathered together, the dark is pushed completely away.

It is not surprise that Jesus was called the Light of the World, one who pushes away the darkness of fear and death. It is also no surprise that Jesus taught, "You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-17)

Light of the world, you take away the darkness in our lives. Teach us to shine as a light of your live. Give us the courage to let our light shine on the proverbial hill that your love might not be hidden. Amen.

*People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.*

This hymn is relatively new to church hymnals, even though it was composed in 1928. Each succeeding verse calls on the earth (furrows), stars, and angels to all get prepared because Love is on the way. In the first verse it is people that are called to get ready because Love, the guest, is on the way.

We often have more guests in our home in December than we do in other months. We work hard to decorate and prepare our homes to receive these guests. How hard do we work to prepare our hearts for the ultimate Guest who has come and is yet to come?

Love, the Guest, we want you to be with us. Yet we often don't take as much attention to preparing our hearts and lives for your presence. Help us sweep away the doubt and fear from all the hidden corners of our hearts that they may be a place that you would wish to dwell. Amen.

December 13

Love Came Down at Christmas

#242

*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.*

Love is like joy. Just as joy doesn't mean we have constant happiness, love does not mean we have those constant "warm fuzzy feelings." Love means commitment to another. Love means care for another, regardless of whether it is a good day or bad day. Love is constant in an inconsistent world. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul talks about all the characteristics of love as they relate to the body of Christ, the church. The perfect example of love came in the form of the baby Jesus, and in his life and ministry including his death and resurrection. Love is for us and for all people. Love—perfect love—came down to us at Christmas.

*God of love, thank you for your perfect gift of love
in Jesus Christ. May we share that love with everyone
that we meet as part of our love for you. Amen.*

December 14

There's a Song in the Air

#249

*There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer
and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire
while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a King!*

Have you ever tried to imagine what that first Christmas night was like? The Bible tells of a "multitude" of heavenly beings praising God. The light must have been greater than anything we can imagine. The sound—oh, the sound! Greater than any crowd at a sporting event. More beautiful than the greatest choir ever assembled. And why all this fuss? It's all over a baby. A small newborn baby who entered this world like every other baby. A crying baby whose mother offers a prayer of praise and thanks. A baby in a cattle trough in a small forgotten backwater town. A baby who has come to be King of the hearts of all people.

*Let us lift our song to you, wonderful God! Let us
join the voices in heaven and on earth in a song of
praise for the King in the manger. Amen.*

Loving Joy

December 16

What Child is This

#219

December 15

Joy to the World

#246

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.*

The third Sunday of Advent is the candle of Love. It's a reminder of God's love for the whole creation. In Genesis 3, the man and woman sinned against God by eating from the forbidden tree. This sin broke the close relationship between God and creation. The result of this break was the loss of paradise. Thorns would grow from the ground. There would be conflict between the humans and the serpent who represented disobedience. The world would seem cursed. But out of love, God sent a messiah to remove the curse, to restore that relationship. We can sing for joy, knowing that sin is defeated and love has won.

*Loving God, we have broken the relationship with you
by disobeying your laws and betraying your love.
Forgive us and show us how the curse sin has been
broken by the life and love of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!*

If you have ever held a newborn child, you know the feeling that this child is so precious but so helpless. As a parent or grandparent, you may hold a child and ponder about her future. Will she be a scientist? An astronaut? A teacher? And in your heart, you know you will do whatever you can to support her and lead her.

The prophet Isaiah lists many attributes of the one who would come to establish God's kingdom (Isaiah 9:6-7). They include Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. That's a lot to fulfill! Is it possible that this tiny newborn baby will be all that? Did Mary have any idea what the message of the angel would truly mean? Did she, too, ask, "what child is this"? Like us, she knew that whoever else Jesus, he was first and foremost her little boy.

Lord, we stand at the manger and ask, "what child is this?" The simple answer is "Jesus." But the deeper answer is that this child is the savior of mankind. He is our personal savior as well. Help us learn each day more about this child. Amen.

December 17

He is Born

#228

*He is born, the holy Child,
play the oboe and bagpipes merrily!
He is born, the holy Child,
sing we all of the Savior mild.
Thru long ages of the past,
prophets have foretold his coming;
thru long ages of the past,
now the time has come at last!*

Our daughter has played the oboe since 5th grade. It is an instrument that takes some time to become proficient in order to produce a pleasing tone, but once in the hands of a master it has a beautiful and haunting sound. The bagpipe is also an instrument with a distinctive sound. Usually when we think of music to celebrate babies we think of instruments like piano, flute, or harp. Soft and soothing. But this baby needed more celebration! The world has waited for so long, and now it is time to celebrate! This is more Mardi Gras than Brahms's Lullaby. He is born! He will return! It's time to celebrate!

Lord of our celebrations, too often we want to keep our faith to ourselves. Yet how can we not celebrate your gift of love loudly and publically! May we play and sing merrily of your love! Amen.

December 18

In the Bleak Midwinter

#221

*What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him;
Give my heart.*

While tradition holds that Jesus was born on a snowy cold day in December, we really don't know when he was born. But the idea of the frozen earth and its bleakness serves nicely as a metaphor for the world trapped in the frozen grip of sin. In the midst of this bleak outlook, Christ comes quietly bringing a thawing of hearts. When our hearts are free, then we begin to look to what we can offer God in return for all we have received. When giving gifts to family and friends, we try to respond to their gift with one of similar value. But we have nothing that is of similar value to what God has given to us. We may not have a lot of material possessions, but God is not interested in those. We are called to give what we can—our hearts.

Lord of all creation, Master of all that is, was, and will be: Your gift to me is so great. How can I reciprocate? All I have is my whole heart—and it is yours. Amen.

December 19

Hark the Herald Angels

#240

*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 us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"*

Did you know that this wonderful hymn was one of the 8000 or so hymns written by Charles Wesley? This was one of the hymns he wrote in the first year after he had a life-changing encounter with Christ. The third verse (above) gives us just about all we need to know about Christ—heaven-born, Prince of Peace, Sun of Righteousness, light, life, healing, giver of second birth (eternal life). Can we even sing this without smiling? Without wanting to sing at the top of our lungs, “Glory to the newborn king!”? As we move closer and closer to the celebration of Christmas, hopefully our praise will get louder and louder, inviting others into the song!

*May our praises to you, O Christ, rise higher and higher until with the angels we sing your glory.
Amen.*

December 20

Away in a Manger

#217

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;
the stars in the heavens looked down where He lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

*The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.*

The beauty of this peaceful carol is in its simplicity. Even the youngest children can learn and sing the simple words and tune. The message is also simple—Lord Jesus came like a simple baby. This same Lord Jesus is someone I can call on to be with me at all times. Sometimes we get so caught up in the “bigness” of Christmas that we need a reminder of the simple message of the manger.

*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay
close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.
Amen.*

December 21

O Little Town of Bethlehem

#230

*How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still,
the dear Christ enters in.*

It's just a few days before Christmas. Our televisions and radios remind us of how many "shopping days" we have left. When we go to the stores, the crowds seem more determined, the music seems louder. Even the bell ringers next to their red kettles seem to be louder than usual. It can get overwhelming.

We need to step away. We need to remember that Christ came quietly, with almost no one noticing at the time. Maybe tonight is the night to turn off the television, turn on the lights on the tree, and remember that God's blessing slips into our lives quietly—when we least expect it.

*O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin 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!*

Celebratory Joy

December 22

Joy to the World

#246

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

The fourth Sunday of Advent we light the candle of Joy. The joy of Christ is here and we celebrate. The closing verse of our hymn brings out the image of Christ who will come in glory. There will come a time that we will celebrate not just the birth of Jesus, but the return of Christ to rule the world. He will rule with love and righteousness. And we know it will happen because Jesus promised to return. That is the joy we celebrate! That is the joy that allows us every day to face whatever tragedies the world can throw at us with hope—hope for the future. We look forward in hopeful joy, knowing that the promises of Christ are true. We live in peaceful joy, knowing that the conflicts of the world are only temporary. We live in the loving joy of Christ who cares for each of us by name. We live in the celebratory joy of Christ who will come again. Joy to the world!

*Christ the baby, Christ the teacher, Christ our
savior: Come into our hearts. Come into our lives.
Come into our world. Teach us the joy of your
hope, your peace, your love. Bring us closer to you
each day. Amen.*

December 23

The First Noel

#245

*The first Noel the angel 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.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.*

The word “noel” is borrowed from the French. It simply means “a Christmas song.” So the first Christmas song was sung by the angel to the shepherds. This hymn is interesting because the five verses tell the story of the shepherds, the star, and the wise men (even though it doesn’t mention Jesus until verse 4!). By singing through all the verses, we can get a good overview of the whole story as recorded in Matthew and Luke.

The refrain might also be loosely rendered as “Sing, Sing, Sing, Sing! Born is the King of Israel.” What better way to celebrate!

Like the Wise Men, O Lord, may we enter into your presence reverently and on bended knee. May we never stop seeking to be closer to you. Amen.

December 24

Silent Night, Holy Night

#239

*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.*

“Silent Night, Holy Night” is probably the best known Christmas hymn in much of the world. The exact origins of the song are shrouded in legend. We know for sure that it was first performed in Oberndorf, Austria on December 24, 1818. The words were composed by Father Joseph Mohr who gave his poem to organist Franz Gruber, asking him to compose a simple melody for voice and guitar since the organ was damaged and could not be used that Christmas eve. By 1819 there were already families of folk singers who included it in every show. Its popularity spread around the world quickly. The hymn currently has been translated from the original German into 140 languages.

For many Christians, worship on December 24 is not complete until they have sung “Silent Night” at church with candles ablaze. The simplicity of the words and the melody make it memorable and easy to sing.

We must not oversimplify the message, though. It is a radical message of a new world that has been ushered in by the birth of Jesus. The simple birth of this baby is the dawn of a new world, a redeeming grace. Nothing will ever be the same again.

Holy infant, Son of God, love's pure light: We wait all year to sing this hymn, watching the candles flicker in the darkness. Your people waited for generations for the messiah to come to dispel the darkness of the world. Now you have come, bringing the dawn of your radical new world. Help us live as people who truly celebrate the new life that is here. Amen.

*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!*

Oh, to be a child again on Christmas Day! We have waited and waited and FINALLY the day is here! We rush to the tree, hoping to find something special with our name on it. We are so eager we can hardly stand still.

Growing up, my brothers and I learned that Santa always put a ladder covered in a blanket in the door to the living room. No one was allowed in until we had eaten breakfast. I can remember occasions when one of us was not eating fast enough to satisfy the others. We would “encourage” each other with “come on! We want to get our presents!” When we were all finished Mom would remove the blanket as we rushed to find a seat, waiting to be handed our gifts.

This Christmas Day, as you reflect on this hymn, don’t think of a choir in robes, processing down the center aisle of a great cathedral. Think of an eager child, pulling at your hand, saying, “Come on! Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!”

*Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv'n; Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing: may we recover the joy and
excitement of rushing into your presence in
celebration. Amen.*