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Songs
of
Christmas
Devotional
2019





Dear Church Family,

Christmas should be all about Jesus. After all He is the reason for the season. However, the reality is this season has grown way past a simple celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It's more than a holiday! It's a physical and emotional journey that is not for the faint of heart.

Things like parties, presents, and food have added a dimension to the season that could not have been imagined 100 years ago. Industry experts say the average American is going to spend \$920 per person on holiday gifts this year. That's more than \$1 trillion. Dietitians tell us that the average adult consumes 7,000 calories on Christmas day. I can't even do the math on that number!

Throughout this madness we call the holiday season, something you will find either at the forefront or in the background, are The Songs of Christmas. There are 13 different Christmas music channels on Sirius XM this year. 85% of Americans have a favorable attitude about Christmas music. There are likely several reasons for this, but the number one reason has to be that music stirs our hearts.

As we explore the biblical songs of Christmas on Sundays at church, I thought it would be encouraging for you to hear the reflections from people at Fellowship of the Rockies about their favorite songs. So, get a cup of eggnog or coffee and have your connected device handy as we journey through the songs of Christmas this holiday season.

Merry Christmas,
Pastor Stewart

December 2nd

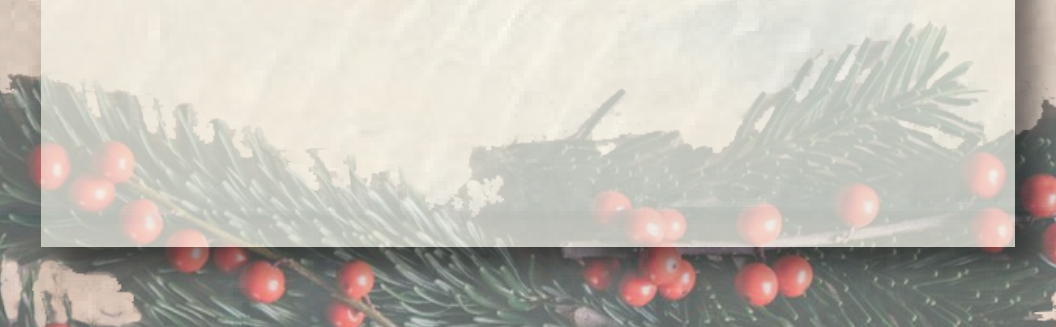
SILENT NIGHT

As a young girl, I felt a sense of wonder during the dark advent nights, when it was time to turn on the Christmas lights. The house suddenly felt magical. Many evenings I sat staring at the nativity decorations and the lights on the tree. All was calm; all was bright.

Raising a family during advent was a different experience, evenings full of activities, cramming in holiday projects, feverishly trying to finish up gifts. Yet the warm glow of the lights still set a special tone and the wonder returned. When the kids were finally in bed, I would sit by the tree listening to Amy Grant's 'Breath of Heaven', savoring a moment of stillness. It helped me sleep in heavenly peace. All was calm; all was bright.

In this season of life, my advent evenings are quiet, unless the grandkids happen to be over, making a joyful noise. Still the decorations are faithfully in place right after Thanksgiving, and the lights come on as soon as the sun dips behind Pikes Peak. Frequently, I find myself reflecting on the mystery of His birth, the mother and child, the holy infant so tender and mild. All is calm; all is bright.

For me, the advent nights are an opportunity for a holy reset. Being surrounded by reminders of the gift of Jesus, nudges me to allow Him back into His proper place, into the place of primary importance in my life. When I do, all is calm; all is bright.





Advent is a holy time, a time to ponder the Son of God, the embodiment of love's pure light. His birth brought the dawn of redeeming grace, ushering in hope for life eternal, allowing the radiant beams of His holy face to shine on our life. Only this can bring peace to our soul. Heavenly peace.

Allow yourself a few silent nights, holy nights, this Christmas season. And if you are going through difficult things or have experienced loss, this is doubly important for your survival. Let Jesus receive your burdens, renew your hope, and restore your peace. And you will find that all is calm, and all is bright.

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

Contributed by Cyndy Sherwood



December 3rd

AWAY IN A MANGER

*“Away in a manger, no crib for a bed.
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head”*

How many times have you heard this carol during the Christmas season? For me, as long as I can remember. As I approach my 73rd Christmas, it was the Christmas that I was 8 years old that I remember hearing this carol and the Christmas Story from the book of Luke for the first time.

My family moved often during my grade school years. Each time we moved my mother would find a church close to our new home. She did not drive so we would walk. We would only go a couple of times and not go back. But that year I turned 8, we had just moved across town in Denver and she joined a Christian church two blocks from our house. My dad even started attending and soon we were going every Sunday. This was also when I attended my first Sunday School class. It was during the Christmas season and I remember hearing the Christmas Story from Luke being read by the Sunday School teacher. She was reading from a Children's Bible Story Book and I was amazed that I could understand what she was reading. My mother would sometimes read the Bible to me at home, but it was a King James Bible, and everything sounded like a foreign language. I really liked going to Sunday School after that because it was just like story time at school.

But...all too soon we moved again, and I never returned to Sunday School. Yet today over 65 years later, every time I hear 'Away in a Manger' with that wonderful story of our Savior's birth, I have a flash back to the Sunday School class at that church in Denver. I don't remember anything about the actual church, but I remember the carol and story.



There is another side of the Christmas season. It is the sadness of loved ones who we have lost and are no longer here. Gail and I experienced this when our daughter Linda was murdered. It caused depression and sadness and made it hard to even deal with holidays for those first few years after her death.

But as time went on, we could again believe in Gods promise. Linda was a believer in Christ Jesus, and we know that someday we will be together again. As the end of the carol's words bring renewed joy to our lives.

“Bless all the dear children in your tender care
and take us to heaven, to live with you there”

Contributed by George Richards



December 4th

HARK THE HERALD

This song is one of the first I can ever remember singing at Christmas. I learned it at church as a very young child and could sing all of the verses before I started to school. That accomplishment did not mean that I understood the song—it's a hard one for a child to understand. I remember singing the words but not making much sense of them.

What is a “herald”? How was Jesus “veiled in flesh”? Does Jesus have wings? It says so in the song.

Over the years, as my understanding of the work Christ increased, I came to appreciate this song for its depth and unvarnished truth of the gospel. Written by Charles Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church in America, it is rich with the essential doctrinal truths about Christ: He was God in the flesh who came to earth to live as a man and to reconcile us to Himself. He was “born to raise the sons of earth; born to give them second birth”.

I've noticed that the truth about Christ and His sacrifice for us is often as misunderstood to most people as this song was to me as a child. The true reason Christ came to earth and what He did for us when He died for our sins is the most compelling story in history—God himself redeemed His creation through His own sacrifice. There is no other like it—no mythology in any culture even comes close to this truth or to anything nearly as wonderful.



But compelling though it is, this truth is rejected or not understood by millions of people. Americans in general do not grasp this amazing reality. Most of them would describe Christianity as a set of rules that one is required to keep, to earn the favor of God, which is just a variation of every other religious system on earth. This common misconception, a clever lie of Satan, keeps many from learning the real truth, that God gives salvation freely and paid the price for it Himself. This misunderstanding prevents some from even acknowledging the existence of God himself.

I recently heard a comedic actor, who is a well-known atheist, say that he does not understand why people pray to God to help them find their car keys when that same God did not save people who prayed to be rescued from the Holocaust. What a tragic misunderstanding of the purposes of God and His love toward us. The fact that there is evil in the world is not the reason I personally need God to veil himself in flesh and come live with us here on earth. The fact that there is evil in my own heart is the reason I need God. The difference between the greatest evil ever manifested and my own selfishness is one of quantity, not quality. I need a savior as much as the worst person who ever lived. This is the beauty of the news those heralding angels gave—at last, God has come to earth to reconcile himself to his own creation—those of us with selfishness, greed, lust and every manner of evil hidden in our hearts. We can live in fellowship with Him, our creator because He is now our redeemer.

Contributed by Lyn Farrell



December 5th

I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

I love to hear Christmas carols any time of year. And although the Christmas season certainly has something to delight all our senses—the fresh smell of pine boughs, the twinkle of the lights, the creamy sweetness of a favorite fudge recipe—the sounds of Christmas are a cherished part of each year's celebration.

Even the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow appreciated the importance of Christmas sounds when he penned the words to the familiar carol "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" for his church in 1864. The miseries of the Civil War were much with Longfellow as he wrote. He managed an optimistic first line reading, "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."

But then in sadness he added, "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." Gratefully he went on to write, "Yet 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."

Those words are as comforting today as they must have been to those in Longfellow's Boston Sunday school class decades ago. Can we let the sounds of Christmas peal in our hearts again? The carols we love can soothe our souls if we really listen to the words, and should be the primary soundtrack of our Christmas season—not just the background music in the grocery store. Add a choir singing Handel's Messiah with full orchestral accompaniment to the mix, and you'll be truly blessed!



And oh, the bells! I was blessed to live in a small town in Germany many years ago and can still remember the church bells ringing out familiar carols at Christmas time. Carillons and bell towers in small towns in America still do the same. Seek one out, bundle up on a bench nearby, and let the bells minister to you.

Listen for the sounds of Christmas in your own home, too. Coffee perking before everyone is up on Christmas morning. Perhaps children or grandchildren squealing with delight when they see their gifts. Laughter and conversation around the Christmas dinner table.

But may you also have moments of quiet solitude when you can reflect on the words of the angel accompanied by the songs of the heavenly host so long ago: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).”

Contributed by Nancy Brummett

December 6th

IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER


When I was a young adult, I first heard the poem “In the Bleak Midwinter” sung by a popular Christian band on a Christmas album. However, very recently, the words have come to life in my mind as I’ve pondered its magnificence and meaning.

The first verse paints a picture that is very familiar to us as Coloradans: “bleak midwinter, frosty, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone, snow on snow, snow on snow.” I love the scene: layers and layers of beautiful white; but the fact is, it covers a harsh reality: the land is actually barren, cold, dreary, miserable, icy...and there is no hope of change.

Then, the subsequent verses describe the only Hope. Our Creator God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal—there is no one like Him, He cannot be contained by anything, anyone, anywhere. The Most High King comes as promised. The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ, comes humbly to a stable. Warm milk & a manger of hay & His mother’s kisses were sufficient for Him as angels and animals gather and recognize the greatness of this moment.

The scene is remarkable, for the holy God has arrived as fully man. The Messiah has come. He is the One who breaks us free from sin’s icy, hard, miserable grip. So, what is our response?

The impactful last verse helps us. The poem switches from describing the scene to one of personal reflection:



“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.”

During this time of year, it is a common challenge to have just the right gift idea for at least one person in our lives. That person might just have “everything”. Or, you want to come up with something that is not from the wish list—something that shows how much thought you’ve put into the gift. Or, you know what would be a thrill but you simply can’t afford it (there’s Dave Ramsey’s voice ringing in your head again!).

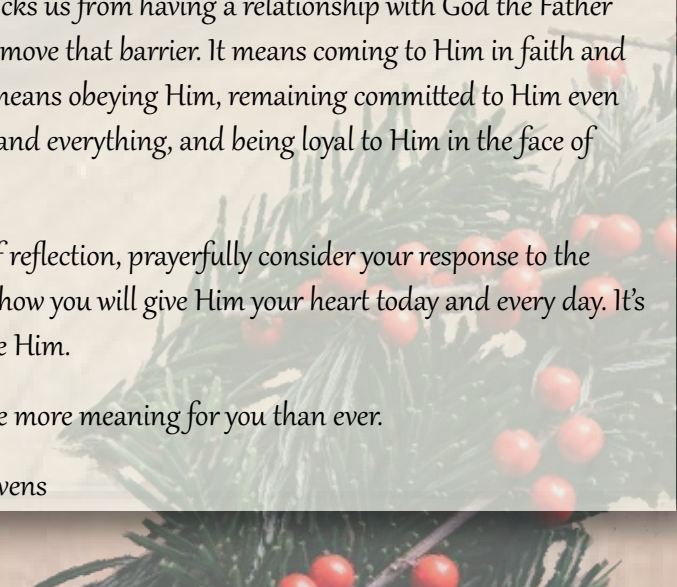
With Jesus—the One who indeed owns everything—it is easy. How should we respond to the truth that Hope came to us as promised? We already have the gift that He desires from us; there is no need to go shopping for it. All He wants is your heart and my heart.

So, what does it mean to give your heart to Jesus? I think it first means to realize the sin problem that blocks us from having a relationship with God the Father and what Jesus did to remove that barrier. It means coming to Him in faith and repentance. But it also means obeying Him, remaining committed to Him even when you don’t understand everything, and being loyal to Him in the face of opposition.

In these few moments of reflection, prayerfully consider your response to the Baby King’s arrival and how you will give Him your heart today and every day. It’s the only gift you can give Him.

May this Christmas have more meaning for you than ever.

Contributed by May Stevens



December 9th

JINGLE BELL ROCK

Performed by the famous American country singer Bobby Helms, the now-classic Christmas song “Jingle Bell Rock” remains to this day, an all-time American favorite. Originally written by the late American songwriters Joe Beal and Jim Boothe and performed by Bobby Helms a month before Christmas in 1957, this cheerful and catchy tune highlights the joy and happiness of the Christmas spirit.

The song itself reminds its listeners to be joyful and cheerful, for the season of joy is upon us. Much like this song and its meaning of joy and cheer, I am reminded of Psalm 67:3-5. “Let the peoples praise you, God; let all the peoples praise. Let the nations rejoice and shout for joy, for you judge the peoples with fairness and lead the nations on earth. Let the peoples praise you, God, let all the peoples praise you”. Just like the Psalmist says, “Let all people praise you, God”.

During this Christmas season, I am reminded of how much I love God. He is my father in heaven, my righteous judge, and provider. His love for me knows no boundary, for he sacrificed his one and only son so that I may be forgiven and have eternal life in heaven. When we focus all of our attention on why we should “shout in joy, and praise the Lord”, we begin to realize that all of life’s problems are but a smudge in our lives compared to the love our father in heaven has for us.

So I say, let us be joyful and full of praise for our father in heaven is our “heavenly father and righteous judge”. And like the song says, let us all “Dance and prance in Jingle Bell Square in the frosty air” for the season of Joy is upon us, for we have a loving and righteous God. I wish for every one of you to experience such joy during this upcoming holiday season. Merry Christmas and God Bless!

Contributed by Nagib and Raquel Mamud

December 10th

LITTLE DRUMMER BOY

I chose “Little Drummer Boy” for this devotional because it was one of my favorite Christmas songs when I was growing up. To this day, my Mother will tell you that while my Dad was in Vietnam, I started listening to the Ray Conniff version of this song in October and played it over and over and over through Christmas that year.

There are three phrases in this song I would like to call out today. First phrase; “So to honor Him”. The Kings traveled great distances to offer their gifts to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords for one reason and one reason only; to honor Him. There was no posing, no favor seeking motives, no expectations of anything in return.

Matthew 2:10 states that when they found Jesus “they were overjoyed” and in verse 11 “they bowed down and worshiped him”. Second phrase; “I played my best for Him”. The young man stepped up! He didn’t shy away from the moment of his encounter with the newborn King. He didn’t attempt to quickly get it over to avoid attention. He set aside all doubt and fear that may have been playing in the back of his mind and simply gave his best. Third phrase; “Then He smiled at me”. I’m sure all of us agree there is something special about the smile of an infant. They make eye contact with you, their face brightens into a smile, and your heart melts! Can you imagine how much more amazing it would be to see the Lord smiling at you? That would be the “well done, good and faithful servant” that we all long to hear.

As the countdown to Christmas continues, it is my prayer that those reading this devotional will take that opportunity to give their best to honor Him. When we find ourselves in that moment, that we won’t let it pass us by, that we won’t let ourselves get caught up in the cares of the world. Rather, that we would enter in with our hearts open and properly aligned with what God has purposed. And in doing so, experience the unspeakable joy which is found when our hearts are set solely on Him.

Matthew 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Pa rum pum pum pum

Contributed by Rob Johnston

December 11th

MARY DID YOU KNOW?

Once again Christmas time is upon us along with the seasonal songs. Whether they be old or new, fondly associated with memories or not, each have the potential to cause one to stop and think. One such song that comes to mind is "Mary, Did You Know?" Each year I find myself wondering - "Did Mary really know who her child was or what He would do?" "Why did God choose her?" "What were the implications?" and "Why is this important?" With my curiosity at a high, this year I sought to address these recurring questions by digging into the Scriptures.

From reading Luke 1 we can acknowledge that Mary was a young, Jewish peasant girl who was acquainted with God's ways and her people's history. Considering this background, in addition to the recognition of Mary's contemplative nature, we can propose that Mary was able to generally grasp the significance associated with the life of 'her' Son. But this still does not reveal why God specifically chose to use her. Think about it...why would God choose a young, Jewish peasant girl who is engaged to be married to bare His child? Upon further Scriptural study, we may deduce that the answer is primarily based in who Mary is – her heart and character. When handed the difficult position of an unwed pregnancy in which she would likely be accused of adultery and experience Joseph canceling their engagement, Mary viewed herself as God's servant and willingly submitted to His will.

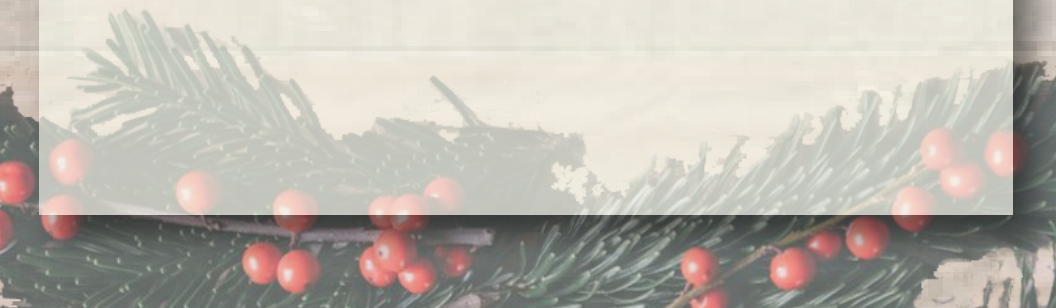
This said, why is Mary's response so important? Does it possess any significant implications? Returning to the Scriptures, we recognize that God utilizes Mary to enact the fulfillment of messianic prophecy through the incarnation of Jesus. The purpose was/is our redemption by the fulfillment of Christ's work on the cross.



Thus, an intrinsic connection exists between the Son's birth and His death. It is only Jesus – the eternal Son of God - that can be the mediator between God and mankind.

The point is God uses the 'unexpected' for His purposes. Mary was a young girl who found herself pregnant and engaged to be married despite being a virgin in a society where unwed pregnancy was unacceptable, yet she was dedicated to serving the Lord with her whole being no matter the cost. She was willing to accept God's unique purpose and calling on her life. And so, I ask myself: "Am I prepared to do the same? Am I ready to demonstrate the same willingness, obedience and radical trust in God that Mary did, even if it means enduring hardships? And if so, what does this look like?"

Contributed by Jacqi Schellenberg



December 12th

JOY TO THE WORLD!

The classic Christmas hymn “Joy to the World” was written by the English minister Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and is an all-time favorite hymn sung during the Christmas season. The hymn’s obvious theme is “joy.” But what exactly is joy? We’re all familiar with the joy we feel when our favorite football team wins, our birthday is celebrated (for some), or when we receive an unexpected gift. These are all wonderful experiences, but the joy the Bible speaks of—the joy found in Jesus Christ—goes far deeper and is far more lasting. In fact, it’s everlasting (John 16:22), and is the kind of joy of which Isaac Watts wrote in his hymn.

The joy the Bible speaks of is a joy that “rises above circumstances and focuses on the very character of God” and “looks beyond the present to our future salvation.” In other words, this joy doesn’t depend on our life circumstances but rather on our God and is grounded in the future hope of salvation we have in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In his hymn, Isaac Watts lists several reasons believers in Jesus Christ can be joyful. Let’s look at a couple of them. In the first stanza he writes, “Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King!” So, first, we can be joyful because Jesus Christ has come! Reflect on this a moment. He is the One the prophets spoke of who came as “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14; 8:10; 9:6-7), which means “God with us” (Matt 1:23). But more than that, He came to complete an important mission from God—to take away our sin (John 1:29), to reconcile lost people to God (2 Cor 5:19), and to make available eternal life to those who believe in Him (John 3:16). Forgiveness...reconciliation...eternal life...these are truly great reasons for joy!



Secondly, the last stanza of the hymn ends with praising “the wonders of His love.” It was God’s love that moved Him to forgive, reconcile, and grant eternal life. The Bible tells us God is love (1 John 4:8). William D. Mounce says, “Because He is love, He acts with love toward an undeserving world to save them from their sins.” Moreover, God made the first move; He loved us when we were not even interested in knowing Him. Romans 5:8 tells us, “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NIV, italics mine). Now that is the kind of love only God could give and exactly the kind people need most. Joy to the world, indeed!

May your joy overflow this Christmas season as you spend time with friends and family. And may this season also remind us of the many reasons to have joy in our God and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Contributed by Ira Cutting

December 13th

O COME LET US ADORE HIM

I love to worship, that's no secret. In exultation, no doubt. When I sing to God and help lead others to His presence, I am my truest self. This song reminds me of God's holiness and the contradiction that is the invitation from perfection extended to me- a sinner- to worship in His throne room. In "O Come Let Us Adore Him" I can sense the excitement of the shepherds, rushing to meet the King, signaled by a bright star in the dark night. I am thrilled by the line, "the word of the Father, now in flesh appearing". Knowing that night was planned since time began, the beginning of reconciliation between God and his people.

Adoration comes from the Latin "adorare", which means to worship, to speak and to pray. To adore is to venerate; or bestow utmost respect. We typically adore that which is most precious to us. Our truest form of worship is complete and unashamed adoration of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who loves us and considers US worthy to be in his presence.

Worship is in the daily discard of our idols- those things that we allow to tell us who we are and what we devote our time, talent and energy towards- anything that is not the true God. Jesus talks about those who honor Him with their lips, but their hearts are far from him in Matthew 15. I don't want to just attend church and sing another song out of duty or expectation. I want to worship as a response to Him.

Worship is acknowledgment of Him as Author of life, the one who knows the hills and valleys of our individual human struggle. It's remembering that He is the God who sees us in our dark places. He never leaves us. It's also thanking the God who puts us on the mountaintops of our lives and remembering His provision.



Worship is the true connection of our frail human heart with the strong, steadfast and pure love of God. In relationship with Him, we come to know our God given identity and learn to walk it out so we can glorify Him with our lives. This is the offering- our very selves. Our agenda, our emotions and our desires.

Amazingly, as this song reminds us, we are worshiping Him alongside the heavenly host as citizens of heaven. Right now! Revelation 7:11 states, "And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God." Deuteronomy 34:43a states, "Rejoice with him, you heavens, and let all of God's angels worship him. Rejoice with his people, you Gentiles, and let all the angels be strengthened in him." What a beautiful thought it is- right now, angels surround him and heap pure praise upon him. And yet, He desires YOUR worship. What only you can bring. How will you adore him this season?

O Come Let Us Adore Him.

Contributed by Sarah Norwood



December 16th

THOU DIDST LEAVE THY THRONE (THERE IS ROOM IN MY HEART FOR THEE)

Each year as we enter the Christmas Season, familiar carols ring forth over the media and at our church services. I've particularly been blessed joining carolers as we visit shut-ins or neighbors with the joyful sounds of Christmas. However, this hymn, perhaps not as familiar to some, is rich in theological import.

Describing the reality of the Lord Jesus, pursuing us in accordance with God's eternal plan and doing so in such a unique way – a manger in Bethlehem! The angels heralded it, yet the lowly shepherds responded as our representatives. Today, we rush about pursuing our own interests with agendas packed so full there is little time or room for Him. His journey to Calvary provided the absolute best gift to broken hearts, but in today's rush we seldom take time to reflect on how really broken our lives are. The same tendencies that nailed Him to the cross can and do keep us bound rather than set free!

The last stanza is a renewed call to us to accept His provision for, "There is room at My side for thee."

John 1:10-12, *The Living Bible*, says: "But although he made the world, the world didn't recognize him when he came. Even in his own land and among his own people, the Jews, he was not accepted. Only a few would welcome and receive him. But to all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them."





Can we take time this Christmas to re-set our lives with the central focus on Him? Not just making room for Him, but, instead, pursuing Him and accepting more fully His provision of freedom? Can we sing that great chorus, "O Come to my heart, Lord Jesus – There is room in my heart for Thee!"

Contributed by Dick Reynolds



December 17th

WE THREE KINGS

My six-year-old son is obsessed with outer space! Every time I go to the library, I bring back new books about galaxies, planets, stars, and so on! We read these books right before bed. Often, we talk about how our mind is blown! Thinking about outer space...the billions of galaxies, trillions of stars, the millions of light years that separate galaxy from galaxy. Then I think about Earth and me on the Earth. The earth is $1/1,000,000$ the size of the sun. If you look at an actual picture of the earth in the context of how big outer space is, Earth is literally a speck! I am $1/8,000,000,000$ of all the people on the earth. That could make us feel insignificant. Yet Christ came for us, because He loves us. Small and insignificant as we humans are (in the grand scheme of the universe), we have a God who loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son to save us! (John 3:16) Is your mind blown yet? Mine is!

As I think about the song, We Three Kings, two thoughts come to mind. First, Bible scholars speculate that these three men were astronomers. They studied outer space, and as limited as their knowledge was in their day, they noticed a star. An out of the ordinary star, brighter than bright, and they decided to follow it. At the perfect time, God placed the star over the stable where the manger lay. Do you know the chances of that happening? I don't even think there's a statistic for that! These men, in their quest for the Christ child, followed the star for months, in order to bow down to the baby King, give him gifts and worship him! (Matthew 2:1-16)



My second thought is this...These three kings traveled thousands of miles over fields, fountains, moors and mountains, all in search of the baby King. How far are we willing to go to be with Christ? We don't have to travel across the universe, scale mountains, or forge through rivers. We just need to be still in His Presence, seek Him, pray to Him, read His Word, and worship Him! He's right here with us, our perfect Light! This Christmas season, let's allow our minds to be blown by the power, the magnitude and the saving love of Christ! He's right here, waiting for us! Let's accept His invitation! Worship the God most high!

Contributed by Krista McCallister



December 18th

THIS LITTLE CHILD

The Christmas Song "This Little Child" By Scott Wesley Brown is over 30 years old and still speaks today. Here are some of the lyrics.

Who would of tho't that long ago
So very far away
A little child would be born
And in a manger laid
And who would have tho't this little child
Was born the King of kings
The Son of just a carpenter.
For whom the angels sing
And who would have tho't that as He grew
And with other children played
This child with whom they laughed and sang
Would die for them some day
And who would have tho't this little child
Could make a blind man see
Feed the hungry make rich the poor
And set the sinner free
Oh who would have tho't this little child
Was who the prophets said
Would take away the sins of man
And rise up from the dead



The rest of the song points to our need for a King and Savior. And Jesus, This Little Child we celebrate at Christmas, is that Savior. He also, is the King of Kings and will come back to reign on earth someday. Do we believe this as truth? It has amazing meaning to us, as we celebrate Christmas, we should keep in mind the One we are celebrating also, died for us to give us eternal life and a purpose in this one.

John 12:27-28 reads this way,

27 "Now my soul is greatly distressed. And what should I say? 'Father, deliver me from this hour'? No, but for this very reason I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Can you imagine how the disciples were processing all of this new information? They had been with Him for over 3 years and now He is talking nonsense. The greatest breakthrough of all was when they all realized that He is the King of Kings and came to save them and us! Oh! I hope you believe! This Little Child was who the prophets said He was, and He is coming again.

Christmas is such a great time to celebrate the arrival of a baby in Bethlehem and we should celebrate it with Joy! When the Angels announced His birth to the shepherds in the fields, they did so with a majestic show of power and excitement. It was such a demonstration of power that the shepherds were scared! But when they calmed down, they made their way to see This Little Child lying in a manger.

Do you believe you are blessed to know This Little Child is the One the prophets said would be coming? And that He is the One who gave you eternal life?

Contributed by Pastor Darren Melugin

December 19th

THE CHRISTMAS SONG

"Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose..."

'The Christmas Song' always reminds me of walking around downtown Chicago as a kid. I grew up in a faraway suburb of the big city, but every year we would head downtown in December to take in the lights and decorations, marvel at the story-telling windows of Marshall Fields, and get popcorn or hot chocolate. On the street corners vendors would be roasting chestnuts on little carts, which would always compel my dad to start singing 'The Christmas Song'.

I don't have the best memory - any of my family can confirm this - so special memories from childhood aren't always crystal clear. They tend to merge together and become general concepts and feelings. I think what makes this song so special to me is that it's identifiable and specific to the general memories and feelings of my childhood.

As I got older, the tradition of going into Chicago in December continued. So, the childhood memory came to include adult memories of coming home from college and being "home" again. And then I got married and going downtown became a favorite Christmas tradition with my wife, and then later, my kids. This song brings back great memories gathered over many decades.

But it's also much more than just fun memories. Since I was a child, the true meaning of Christmas has always been at the center of every Christmas - the great gift of God's son Jesus, born in Bethlehem, destined to live a sinless life, die for our sins, and live again. Because of this, the joy from past Christmas memories is not fleeting. It is joy from memories that are tied directly to eternal truth.



Some Christians draw hard lines between "Christian" things and "non-Christian" things. This is often called the sacred-secular divide. Such hard-liners may be offended by the fact that my favorite Christmas song is not a great hymn of the faith. If that's you, all I can do is ask for your grace. If you believe in a hard sacred-secular dividing line and are convinced that a Christmas tree is a pagan decoration (for example), I think you should honor your conviction and not decorate a tree. But if you don't have strong convictions and are seeking God's direction in your life at this time of year, I would direct your attention to 1 Corinthians 10:31 - "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Unless your song, or tradition, or decoration causes damage to God's reputation, this verse offers you a lot of freedom... with a healthy dose of responsibility. We are free in Christ to enjoy all of God's gifts, sacred or secular, but we have the responsibility to enjoy it all for the glory of God. While 'The Christmas Song' may not be a religious song, it is one that brings joy to my heart at this time of year - joy that is real and true, and flows directly from celebrating Jesus. Joy that brings glory to God.

Contributed by Matt Cook



December 20th

WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS

We wish you a Merry Christmas, we wish you a Merry Christmas

We wish you a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

When I was a little girl my family moved into the Appalachian Mountains of northern Pennsylvania. Envision driving deep into the woods by means of winding country roads hidden by layers of ice with a beautiful umbrella of snow covering the thick trees above. As you turn the corner stands a little brick church with a steeple housing a bell that was rung on Sunday mornings. This was the first church my dad pastored and where a sweet Christmas memory was created. Poverty was high in this mountain community, some still without the luxury of inside plumbing, and many more interested in keeping their traditional ways and superstitions than hearing about God's love.

During the Christmas holiday our small church family created its own tradition of traveling to these families' homes to sing Christmas carols. This little girl with bright red hair covered in freckles was so excited to sing! I hardly was able to contain my excitement as my momma struggled to keep me still long enough to bundle me up tight to fight off the bitter air. Our little caravan of vehicles drove into the frozen winter night to share God's love as we sang at homes of all diversity. Sometimes we were met by lovely people who were overjoyed by the visit, thanking us with cookies and hot cider. Other times we were met by glares through the window, words encouraging us to leave, or no lights at all. We still sang and always ended with "We Wish You a Merry Christmas..."



As I look back at these memories, it brings tears to my eyes, now understanding the depths of why caroling was so important. Jesus our Savior came into this dark and cold world to be a warm and brilliant light to all, no matter if they welcomed Him or cursed Him. Because Jesus is alive in us, we are children of Light (Ephesians 5:8) and we are to let Light shine through us before others (Matthew 5:16). Jesus is Light and not just a splendid brightness that breaks through darkness, but healing and protective warmth on those bitter winter nights.

As we approach this holiday season and consider the year to come, let's remember God's precious gift to us, Jesus His Son – The Light of the world. God will place a variety of individuals in each of our lives, some for just a moment and others for longer, but always for a specific purpose. We never know when we will meet someone facing their own bitter winter storm. These are the priceless opportunities given to us to allow the Redeemer for all to illuminate through us, sharing His joy, peace and hope to those in desperate need of His healing and protective warm love.

Contributed by Tricia Jantz

December 23rd

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-11)

During advent people worldwide ask: What child is this? Who is Jesus? English poet William C. Dix answered those questions in his 1865 poem entitled, “The Manger Throne.” Later, Sir John Strainer merged verses from Dix’s poem and set them to the “Greensleeves” melody producing our cherished song, “What Child Is This?”

Dix asks us what child is sleeping while angels herald his birth with sweet anthems? Although we may herald the birth of our child as a wonderful miracle of life; the event isn’t accompanied by angels announcing the birth. Dix answers his question stating this baby is “Christ the King...The Babe, the Son of Mary.” The word “Christ” means “our Lord”, “Anointed One” and “Messiah”.

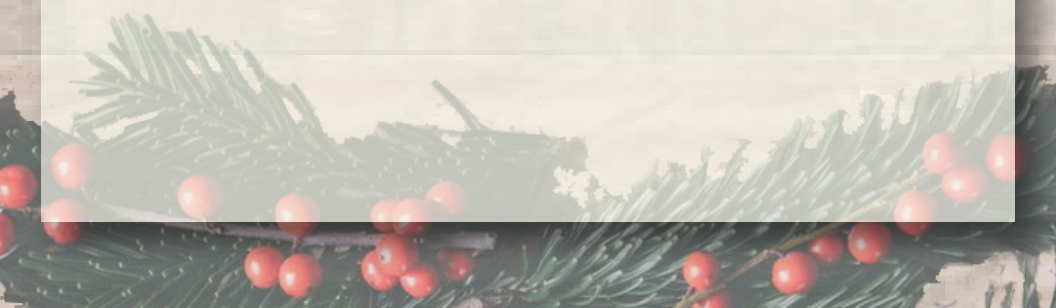
Next, Dix asks why this Child was found in lowly surroundings—a stable with feeding animals? Shouldn’t the Messiah be born into lavishness; have everything the world has to offer? Dix tells us this Child will be pierced with nails and a spear, bearing the cross for you and me; and reminds us Christ is the “Word” who is pleading with Christians and sinners alike. John 1:1, 14 tells us “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father, full of grace and truth.” So, what is the truth this Child was sent to tell? He came to be our Savior, our King!

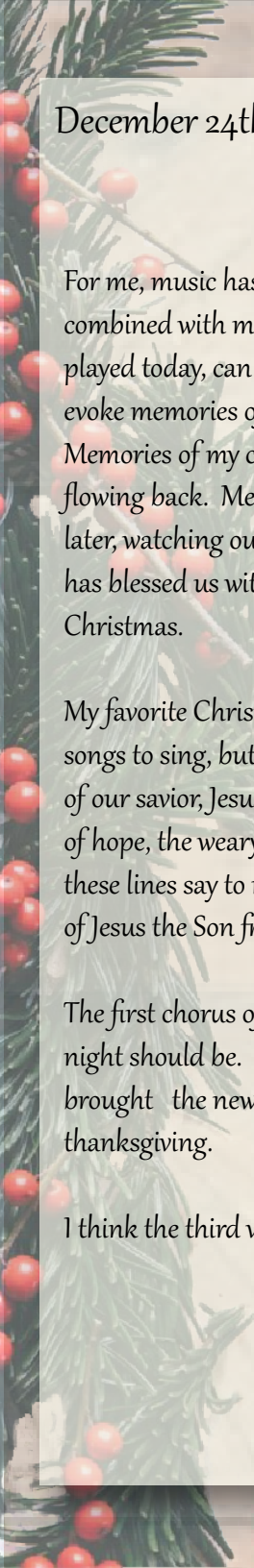


Finally, Dix writes all peoples are to bring gold, incense, and myrrh to the King of Kings. The wise men brought these as prized gifts for a king, but how does that relate to us today? Gold reflects Jesus' kingship and is very valuable. What, of value, can we give to Jesus? We can give Him our time, talents, and resources. Incense represents Jesus' priesthood, a symbol of deity. What gift can we give that's fit for a priest or God? We can give Him our praise, worship, and adoration. Finally, the gift of myrrh (anointing oil) prefigured Christ's death. What can we give Christ that symbolizes death? We can die to ourselves. ¹ Peter 2:24 says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...."

Each verse concludes with an appeal for us to urgently bring praise and honor to Christ the King, the Babe, the Son of Mary. Are we overflowing with the desire to proclaim the Gospel of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection to others? Is it hard for us to contain our excitement in praising and glorifying Christ this advent season? Pray that God will give you that desire.

Contributed by Sandi Leaf





December 24th

OH HOLY NIGHT

For me, music has always been inspiring and transformative. The right melody combined with meaningful lyrics lifts my spirits. A song from my past, but played today, can transport me back to the time it was popular—and instantly evoke memories of that time. This is especially true of Christmas music.

Memories of my childhood, my Mom and Dad, my brother and sister, all come flowing back. Memories of Linda and I together at Christmas as newlyweds, then later, watching our daughter and son enjoying the Christmas season. And God has blessed us with two grandsons who help us make more memories of the joy of Christmas.

My favorite Christmas song is “O Holy Night.” Not the easiest of Christmas songs to sing, but the melody and the words magnify the significance of the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ. “O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining”; “A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices”; “For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn”; these lines say to me that all of creation came alive that night to celebrate the gift of Jesus the Son from God the Father.

The first chorus of the song speaks to me about what my reaction to that Holy night should be. “Fall on your knees, oh hear the angel voices!” A host of angels brought the news of the greatest gift ever! I should be on my knees in thanksgiving.

I think the third verse is a powerful admonition to how I should live every day.



“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.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise His Holy name!”

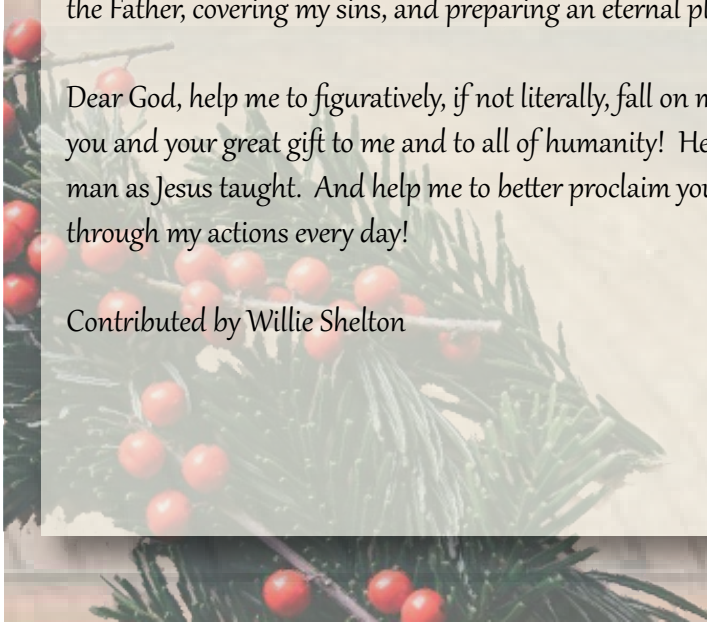
And when I sing this song, if I can get to the final chorus without choking up (which seems to happen more frequently as I get older), my heart seems to join my voice in praising my God.

“Christ is the Lord, then ever, ever praise we!
His pow’r and glory, evermore proclaim!
His pow’r and glory, evermore proclaim!”

What a great finish! On that Holy night, God sent His Son to live among us, to die for us, to defeat death and rise again, and to assume His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. As a believer, I know Jesus is representing me daily to the Father, covering my sins, and preparing an eternal place for me in heaven.

Dear God, help me to figuratively, if not literally, fall on my knees in worship of you and your great gift to me and to all of humanity! Help me to love my fellow man as Jesus taught. And help me to better proclaim your power and glory through my actions every day!

Contributed by Willie Shelton





Fellowship
of the
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Life Change Together