

The Carols of Christmas

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET



Carols of Christmas

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas and continues to Epiphany on January 6th. The season of Christmas is one where we constantly hear the 'sounds of the season' or more commonly called 'Christmas carols'. Have you ever really listened to the words and wondered about the origins of these carols and why they have become so popular? People have been singing about the birth of Jesus for centuries and some of the carols have survived that long. Through these devotions we will meditate on the words of the carols and try to discover their underlying truths. I encourage you to listen to or sing these carols after you have read each devotion.

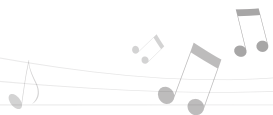
Each day of these devotionals, the focus will be on a different carol to discover all that God gives to us in the birth of Jesus, the Saviour of the world. May you use these devotionals to hear the 'Carols of Christmas' in a different way and help you understand why we worship such a tiny baby. May they strengthen your faith and grow your understanding of God's immense love. Each devotion contains a short reflection, Bible reading and prayer. I would encourage you to read the Bible readings along with the devotion as you hear God's grace through the "**Carols of Christmas**".

**SING SONGS OF JOY IN THE
BIRTH OF OUR SAVIOUR!**

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The First Noel

1st Sunday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:8-15

***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”
Luke 2:14 (NIV-UK)***

Have you thought about what the word NOEL means? We seem to just sing it without knowing – well I have! It is from the Latin verb ‘nasci’ meaning ‘to be born’. This carol has been around for centuries (13th-14th century). The story of the birth of Jesus is not something new. Neither are the carols played in the malls and shopping centres something of modern times. But this carol ‘The First Noel’ was thought to have begun in the theatre as one of the songs in the ‘Miracle Plays’ from Cornwall, England. These plays originated in the Proto-Renaissance period (the time leading up to the Renaissance). It was so popular that it is said people continued singing this carol on the streets outside churches and then it took on a life of its own, bringing the joy and hope of Christmas to all hearing the words.

The carol spread across the continents until finally being transcribed in 1823 with a collection of carols in a book called – ‘Some Ancient Christmas Carols’. This book brought the carol to the attention of Gilbert and Sandys who rewrote the lyrics and music, bringing the song into a more modern form. ‘The First Noel’ was first written to express the wonder of the shepherds and the Wise Men as they saw the angels and followed the star to come into the presence of God our King in the form of a human baby.

The people of Cornwall sang it in the streets to spread the hope and joy of the season. Our world may look very different now, but during this season of Advent as we wait for our Saviour to appear, it brings joy and peace that this world so needs to hear. For centuries people have been hearing this carol and it is encouraging that no matter how much time passes, the story of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, coming down to Earth in human form, will always connect with the hearts of people in need and who are desperate to have this hope in their lives.

♪ Sing or listen to: *The First Noel*

PRAYER

V5: Then let us all with one accord, Sing praises to our heavenly Lord. Who has made heaven and earth of nought and with his blood mankind has bought. Noel – Born is the King of Israel. Amen.



Go Tell It on the Mountain



1st Monday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:8-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

John had received his master’s degree in 1895 from Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee. He was also the director of a church choir and had a passion as a musicologist and was the first African American collector of folk songs and spirituals. He was involved with the famed Fisk Jubilee Singers. John Wesley Work Jr. believed that well-sung slave spirituals could be a healing tool to a deeply divided American nation. He taught Latin and Greek at the Fisk University and his passion for teaching was evident to all the students. In 1916, leadership in the University changed and he was forced out of his role where he had begun to make so much headway in the acceptance of all students no matter what race or creed. It is so sad that he was caught up in such turmoil where he had invested his life in the edification of others through Christian music.

While John and his brother Frederick were compiling one of the first spiritual songbooks in 1907, they were so taken with the chorus ‘Go Tell It on the Mountain’ which had been sung for decades without verses that John sat and wrote the powerful stanzas we know today. His love for African American spirituals also had their deep roots in Scripture – they were great tools to teaching the Bible!

Many of our hymns came out of troubled times when things seemed to be in turmoil and the odds were against the person. But isn’t that just so like God. Out of the difficulties in life come blessings. God sent His Son Jesus into the world in a difficult time in world history with the Romans in power and the government in turmoil. Jesus was born in difficult circumstances with His mother Mary not even having a bed or house in which to have the Son of God. Through all these difficulties we have been blessed and, in this carol, we are encouraged to tell this news to all – Jesus Christ is born!

 **Sing or listen to: Go Tell It on the Mountain.**

PRAYER

V3: Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born, and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn. CHORUS: Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and ev’rywhere; go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born. Amen.



Ding Dong Merrily on High

1st Tuesday in Advent

Read: Psalm 96:1-6

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... as you sing psalms, hymns and songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3:16a, c (NIV)

There are some songs that fill your heart with happy memories. I remember when I was a student at Immanuel College, South Australia, I was in a small choir, that spent lunchtimes together singing for events to be held. This Christmas carol is one I distinctly remember as being a favourite, lending itself to be sung in parts, in quick time and just so joyful. It was also fun to be able to sing the olde English words. Thinking about it even now, many years later I remember the joy in my heart each time we sang it.

I think that is the sort of joy that Paul is talking about in his letter to the Christians in Colossae. A joy that wells up inside and just needs to come out. It is a joy that God plants in our hearts for us to praise God. It is the same sort of overwhelming joy that comes with seeing or having a new child. When you look at that child you cannot but marvel at this beautiful creation who is a gift from God. The angels sang with such joy to herald in the birth of God’s Son and as the first refrain in the carol says: *“In heav’n the bells are ringing...”*, as the carol is sung, I can picture this!

The carol, ‘Ding Dong Merrily on High’ wasn’t originally written as a Christmas carol, it was a secular dance tune written in the 1500s. The Christian words were only written to this tune in 1924 by George Ratcliffe Woodward who had a real interest in bell ringing, which shows in the lyrics. Even though the lyrics don’t specifically speak of Christmas, the fact that the bells in heaven are ringing and the angels are singing and the ‘Gloria’ refrain – well, it really must be Christmas! My favourite part to sing and listen to is the joyful cascading ‘Gloria.’ As you listen, watch it bring a smile to your heart and picture the angels in heaven singing this to the surprised shepherds.

♪ Sing or listen to: Ding Dong Merrily on High.

PRAYER

V1: Ding Dong! Merrily on high in heav’n the bells are ringing. Ding Dong! Verily the sky is riv’n with angels singing. Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis. Amen.



Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus



1st Wednesday in Advent

Read: Micah 5:2

“I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.” Haggai 2:7 (NIV)

We are in the season of Advent – a time set aside to remember the baby Jesus in the manger, and a time when we wait for Jesus to return again in glory. The Israelites had been promised throughout the Old Testament that God would send a King to rule over the world and bring peace. This was fulfilled back over 2000 years ago when Jesus was born in Bethlehem to human parents, yet also the Son of God. When Jesus left the earth for the last time, and ascended into heaven, He promised to return, but no one knows when or where, so we eagerly wait for His second coming (the second Advent).

In 1744, Charles Wesley wrote the beautiful words to this hymn. As he was writing, he considered the verse Haggai 2:7 (above), thinking of the orphans and the class divide in Britain and how Jesus will get rid of all of this when he returns again. He published a prayer at the time: *“Born Your people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now Your gracious kingdom bring. By Your own eternal Spirit, rule in all our hearts alone, by Your all sufficient merit, raise us to Your glorious throne. Amen.”*

The beautiful hymn, ‘Come, thou long-expected Jesus’ was written from this poem and there are a couple of different melodies that it can be sung to. The lyrics in the hymn focus on God choosing to give a Messiah to the world in His Son Jesus. The longing of the Israelites for a Messiah to come and take the burden of sins from them to Himself. Charles Wesley was also inspired by the 17th century philosopher, Blaise Pascal, who stated: *“There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every person that cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator.”*

We rejoice in the coming Son of God this Christmas and wait for Him to come again!

♪ Sing or listen to: Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

PRAYER

V1: 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. V2: Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art; Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart. Amen.



O Come, O Come, Immanuel

1st Thursday in Advent

Read: Matthew 1:22-25

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with Child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)

There are some hymns and carols that flavour your senses. What I mean is that the words, the tune and the whole meaning are a package that affects one’s whole being. For me, this hymn has always been a favourite, I can’t explain why. Maybe it is the flowing tune, the longing wording and the hope that in the coming of this child is the fulfilment of the deepest longing and waiting. When I was a young teenager going to Immanuel College in South Australia, I used to like to think it was about setting the students free from all their studies and we as students were the captive Israel.

From the above verse in Matthew, we understand the meaning to the name ‘Immanuel’ meaning “God is with us” and that is just who Jesus came to the earth to be – God living in and amongst His people. This hymn has its origins in the 8th or 9th century as a monastic ‘O antiphon’ or chant in Latin. But in 1851 John Mason Neale translated it into English. The words and tune were developed separately. The tune has its origins in 15th century France, but in 1851 the tune adapted by Thomas Helmore was paired with the words and published in an early hymnal for the Episcopal Church. There were originally seven verses but through revisions the four verses remain in our current LCA hymnal.

Sometimes it is easy to dismiss the older hymns as not relating to life today – both in style and music. Maybe through these devotions and through gaining further understanding to the deeper story and meaning of these hymns/carols they may be seen in a different light and become new again. No matter the century we live in, we are always in need of a Saviour who was sent to earth by a loving God. We wait expectantly for Jesus’ coming at Christmas and the return (second coming) and we know that in Jesus is the victory and in that we rejoice!

♪ Sing or listen to: O Come, O Come, Immanuel

PRAYER

V1: O come, O come, Immanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear: Rejoice, rejoice! Immanuel. Shall come to thee, O Israel. Amen.



Mary, Did You Know?



1st Friday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:46-55

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name.” Luke 1:46-47, 49 (NIV)

I have always enjoyed music that tells a story – ballads, hymns, modern Christian music that motivates a deeper listening and working out the storyline and what it is that the writer is trying to tell the listener. There is usually a deeper meaning and usually something that is personal to the writer. Many pieces of Christian music and Christmas carols are not written by theologians but rather by those with a personal story to tell. Every Christmas I think about Mary and the whole experience of being told she was to carry the Son of God. As a young girl, not yet married, it was scandalous and even worthy of death. What an incredible woman of faith who trusted without question... so why do we have a Christmas carol filled with questions?

This is one of the newer popular Christian Christmas carols. It was first performed in 1991, by Christian recording artist Michael English. Mark Lowry wrote the powerful words when contemplating the questions that were scripted for a Christmas play at his church. It led to Lowry stating that if anyone knew the answers it would be Mary. The lyrics are asking Mary if she knew the eventual significance and salvation that her son, Jesus, would have for all of humankind for all time and the miracles he would perform. This song connects Christmas and Easter – the birth and the glory.

The song Mary sings in Luke 1:46-55 (the Magnificat) expresses her faith and love in a loving God who has bestowed such a blessing on her. King David in the Psalms wrote songs to a loving God who forgives and is gracious to a people who don't deserve it. Songs express personal stories. This Christmas, lift up your own songs of praise to a loving God who would share the most important person to Him, His Son, with a world not deserving (but needing) love and forgiveness. Praise with your hearts and voices to a loving Father.

♪ Sing or listen to: *Mary, Did You Know?*

PRAYER

V4: Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation? Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations? Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb? This sleeping child you're holding is the Great I AM – Amen.



Do You Hear What I Hear?

1st Saturday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:76-79

***“The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.”
Psalm 29:11 (NIV)***

What are the sounds of Christmas? Last year the Advent devotional was entitled ‘Experiencing Jesus’ which concentrated on our senses and how they are affected through Christmas and in the Nativity story. We saw, touched, tasted, heard and smelled many things. Do you remember some? As we enter Advent again, what sounds do you hear? All the advertisements of things to buy for Christmas? The Christmas carols – ‘Jingle bells’, ‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas’? Is there a chance for you to quiet your heart, mind and soul to hear the little things – the family needing food or a place to live, the church needing help with the activities or planning, the people in need throughout the world and in our neighbourhood in pain, in war?

This Christmas carol, ‘Do You Hear What I Hear?’ loosely tells the story of the nativity – we have a lamb, a star, a shepherd and a king all stopping to ask the questions. Though Jesus is never mentioned, the child is implied to be Him. Reading some background to this song, it wasn’t written to be Christian carol, but God is incredible how He can work through anyone. The carol was written by Noël Regney and the music by Gloria Shayne in 1962. They were married at the time and had written it as a plea for peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It has sold tens of millions of copies and has been performed by hundreds of artists – Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and Whitney Houston.

Peace is a theme of so many songs. Christmas is known as a time of peace and we romanticise the peaceful town of Bethlehem, the peaceful shepherds and the peaceful scene of a family with a new-born baby. It is good to think of peace when everything around us is frantic and busy – peace is what we need. God does send us peace at this time... sometimes you just have to listen for it and find it in the little things – laughter, friends, church and family. May you be blessed to hear all the sounds of Jesus in your life.

♪ Sing or listen to: Do You Hear What I Hear?

PRAYER

V4: Said the king to the people everywhere – Listen to what I say! Pray for peace people, everywhere – Listen to what I say! The Child, the Child sleeping in the night. He will bring us goodness and light. Amen.



I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day



2nd Sunday in Advent

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Luke 2:14 (KJV)

I first heard this Christmas carol sung by a group called ‘Casting Crowns’, a contemporary Christian band formed in 1999. They had a Christmas album and my son was trying to get us out of our 80’s music and bought it for us to play ‘new’ Christmas music. This song was not the traditional carol about Jesus in a manger, rather it had more haunting music with an almost satirical account about ‘Peace on Earth’.

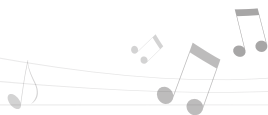
When I did my research I discovered that this carol dates back to 1863 in a poem written by Henry Wordsworth Longfellow. The song is basically about Longfellow hearing the Christmas church bells during the American Civil War. Longfellow went through many hardships and pain in his life beginning with the death of his second wife of 18 years in an accidental fire. This left him with 6 children, the oldest Charles being severely wounded in the Civil War while fighting for the Union Army. Longfellow wrote it Christmas Day when he was feeling optimistic, but he soon fell into pessimism contemplating the Civil War. But it does end on a more hopeful note with a call for faith to overcome the doubt and despair in the world.

We do have a broken world filled with pain, but that makes the miracle of our Saviour’s birth that much more needed. We are so in need of a Saviour – just as in Longfellow’s time. This is a Christmas song that doesn’t cover us in tinsel and holly and where everything is fine, rather it acknowledges that the world is sinful and Jesus’ coming is a message to fill us with joy. Even in all the trials and struggles in this world, we are not forgotten, there is hope for us in the gift by God of a tiny baby. I encourage you if you haven’t heard it, take time to listen and really take in its meaning.

♪ Sing or listen to: I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

PRAYER

V4: Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail, With peace on earth, good-will to men.” Amen.





Christians, Awake, Salute the Happy Morn

2nd Monday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:1-7

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

This hymn is found in our Lutheran Hymnal 625 and as a child I remember this as one of the hymns we used to sing on Christmas morning. At the time I do remember wondering at the first line, “Christians, Awake, ...” maybe the pastor is telling us to wake up after a late night on Christmas Eve with our presents! This is one of the Christmas hymns that some of the older people in our church know well. It is not a hymn or song that I remember having sung for the last few Christmases; but it surely has a rousing tune that would wake up anyone dozing, as an organist would pound this out.

John Byrom (1692-1763) was the writer of this hymn, who supposedly wrote it as a Christmas gift to his daughter, Dolly. He has an incredible history as being the inventor of a system of shorthand that was officially taught at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities and used by the clerk of the House of Lords. He was a very learned man who also studied medicine but decided instead to patent this shorthand in 1740. (This shorthand was also used by John and Charles Wesley, the founders of Methodism). He was both a poet and a literary man who travelled in influential and intellectual circles in London and was also a spiritual man. The hymn tells the story of the first Christmas focussing more on the shepherds and angels. It originally was written with 6 verses, but verse 3 and verses 5 & 6 were combined to give us the four stanzas we have in our hymnal.

The poem was put to music by John Wainwright a couple years after it had been written. Like many of the Christmas carols and hymns, they tell the story of the birth of Jesus. If people do not know much else of the Christian faith, they learn of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. We can thank John Byrom and all our other gifted writers through the ages that faith can be passed on through these wonderful words and stirring music at Christmas.

 **Sing or listen to: Christians, Awake, Salute the Happy Morn**

PRAYER

V4/5: O may we keep and ponder in our mind. God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind; Trace we the babe, who hath retrieved our loss, From His poor manger to His bitter cross; Saved by His love, incessant we shall sing. Eternal praise to heaven's almighty king. Amen.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear



2nd Tuesday in Advent

Read: Colossians 3:15-17

***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests”
Luke 2:14 (NIV)***

Peace – we all want it! We all need it, but at times it just seems so elusive. Peace is mentioned 329 times in the Bible. It is so important, but it is divided into three different kinds: international peace (1 Samuel 7:14), national peace (1 Kings 4:24) and civic peace (Romans 14:19). We can obtain peace from God the Father (Philippians 4:7), Jesus Christ the Son (John 14:27) and the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). In the Christmas story in Luke 2, we read of the angels singing of peace that is come into the world through God’s Son, Jesus.

Many of the songs, hymns and carols of Christmas focus on peace. Is it the peace and serenity of a newborn child in the manger? Is it the peace we feel when thinking of the love God had for us in sending His Son to the world? Is it the ultimate peace we received when Jesus rose from the dead at Easter? The Christmas Carol – ‘It Came Upon the Midnight Clear’ is one carol that doesn’t mention the birth of Christ at all, but rather the focus is on the song of the angels: “Peace on Earth...” This is one of the earliest social gospel hymns written in the US (1849).

Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876) wrote the hymn out of his strong faith in God that He will send His angels to earth to bring peace. But it was written in a time when Edmund Sears was in despair from sickness, the Mexican American War and the unrest of slavery as the US was entering the Civil War. Peace was needed and people were not listening to the angels song bringing “Peace on Earth...”.

We are also living in such a time of unrest. It is up to us to share this message of the Gospel that the angels bring: PEACE! May you find peace in Jesus even though the world around us is in chaos and *“Rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.”*

♪ Sing or listen to: It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

PRAYER

V5: For lo! The days are hastening on by prophet bards foretold, When with the ever-circling years comes round the age of gold; When Peace shall over all the earth, Its ancient splendours fling, And the whole world give back the song Which now the angels sing. Amen.



Behold a Rose is Growing

2nd Wednesday in Advent

Read: Isaiah 11:1-5

***“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”
Isaiah 11:1 (NIV)***

We are in the season of Advent when we reflect on the prophecies leading to the birth of Jesus. Isaiah was a prophet who lived in the 8th Century BC – 700 years before the birth of Christ. In many of his writings in the Old Testament he referred to and prophesied of the coming Messiah being of a virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14), the Good News He will bring and Jesus’ sacrificial death. In Chapter 11, as we read above, tells of the shoot (a rose) which will sprout from the Tree of Jesse (Jesse of Bethlehem, the father of King David) telling of the lineage of Jesus. The hymn first appeared in print in 1599 and has appeared in many translations and with differing numbers of verses, but the original author is unknown (Australian Lutheran Hymnal – 622).

The first verse tells of the prophecy and lineage of Jesus and the second verse concentrates on Mary being a virgin and the birth coming to be through God’s will. The Rose is implied to be Jesus, God’s Son. The words to this hymn are beautiful and tell the story of Jesus’ birth and the reason He came to Earth, *“True man, yet very God, From sin and death He saves us And lightens every load.”* The harmonious tune by the German composer Michael Praetorius in 1609 is most commonly used for this hymn.

Just by my office in Noosa I have a beautiful fragrant rose in a pot. This rose plant flowers throughout the year and often has a flush of 8-10 flowers on a stem. Neighbours across the road and visitors are drawn to stop and smell when it is in flower and cannot but marvel at the fragrance and beauty. For those who are gardeners, it is a *Rose Fragrance King* and a beautiful apricot/peach colour. Jesus is our rose attracting people to Him through who He is (His fragrance and appearance – traits and actions). This Advent attract neighbours and friends to the baby in Bethlehem – through Him we are saved.

 **Sing or listen to: Behold a Rose is Growing**

PRAYER

V3: This flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air, Dispels with glorious splendour the darkness everywhere. True man, yet very God, from sin and death He saves us. And lightens every load. Amen.



The Holly and the Ivy



2nd Thursday in Advent

Read: *Jeremiah 23:4-6*

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21 (NIV)

Holly and ivy are often used in decorating at Christmas. Holly is often referred to as *Christ's thorn* – having a sharpness in the leaves representing the *crown of thorns* and the red berries as a reminder of the blood that was shed for our salvation. In Europe it maintains its bright colours through Christmas. You may be thinking that this is more a story for Easter, but we can't have an Easter without first having a Christmas. The Christmas Carol 'The Holly and the Ivy' cleverly relates the Christmas story with the Easter Passion.

In the carol, the holly symbolises Jesus and the ivy represents Mary, His mother. As you listen or read the words to this carol, keep this fact in mind. It traces the symbolism of the holly plant having prickles, makes a prickly crown, has a blossom, a berry, bitter bark – all referring to the crucifixion of Jesus at Easter. But interwoven into the carol are the words *“And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ”* bringing us back to Christmas. I think it is a very cleverly written carol from the early 19th Century, but the relationship of holly and Christmas go back to medieval times where holly and ivy were used in decorating many British households.

The Advent and Lenten seasons are totally opposite in the emotions and responses to all that is happening. The Christmas story is a lovely one filled with angels, shepherds, shining star, gifts, and above all the birth of a baby, born to be Saviour of the world. But this little baby was born for greater things than to fill us with warm fuzzy feelings, this baby was born to be the Saviour of the World – our Saviour who died a horrible death for us. This Christmas, as you gaze and reflect on God's love in sending His Son as a baby, remember God's greater gift in sending His Son for our redemption.

 **Sing or listen to: *The Holly and the Ivy***

PRAYER

V2: *The holly bears a blossom, as white as the lily flower, And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ, to be our sweet Saviour. CHORUS: The rising of the sun and the running of the deer, The playing of the merry organ, sweet singing in the choir. Amen.*



Angels We Have Heard on High

2nd Friday in Advent

Read: Hebrews 1:1-6

“...when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” Hebrews 1:6 (NIV)

Let me set the scene: Sheep are scattered but settling down for the night, the shepherds have lit a fire, having some dinner and swapping tales of the day as they watch over the sheep and guard them from wild animals. Then, in a divine moment, God burst into the night sky with shining angels singing ‘Glory to God’ and speaking of the Saviour’s birth. In that solitary moment, the shepherd’s lives were transformed – becoming part of a story that has been retold for thousands of years.

No wonder there are so many carols and hymns about the angels and the shepherds. This carol: ‘Angels We Have Heard on High’ reminds us of this amazing night. The refrain “*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*”, literally means ‘Glory to God in the Highest’ and this helps us get a taste of what the angelic chorus sounded like as it sung the Good News – Christ is born! The angels sharing the birth of Jesus to these simple shepherds changed their lives forever. God loves to still speak through ordinary people (you and me) to transform others’ lives into something extraordinary through His grace and love.

The earliest known printed version of ‘Angels We Have Heard On High’ was in an 1842 French song book. Though the source of the song is unknown, it is believed to have originated in 18th century France. The song was first translated into English in 1860 by James Chadwick, a Roman Catholic bishop. As we also sing of the angel’s great announcement this Christmas, don’t forget to also announce to others around you: friends, family, neighbours and work colleagues that yours and my Saviour is born at Christmas to bring life and love into lives filled with emptiness. Jesus lives in our hearts, in our words and our actions announcing the Good News to others through us. There are so many ways to help and show love to people around us – be an angel to the ‘shepherds’ of today! Transform a life for Jesus!

 Sing or listen to: Angels We Have Heard on High

PRAYER

V3: Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing; Come, adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King. Gloria in excelsis Deo! Amen.



O Come, All Ye Faithful



2nd Saturday in Advent

Read: John 1:1-4, 14

***“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.”
John 1:14 (NIV)***

I love to travel. Later this year, my husband and I are going on a journey to Europe to see our son in Switzerland. Many people love to travel and journey to places of significance to them. Part of our travel to Europe is to see the places of our ancestors in Silesia, Poland; Harz Mountains, Germany; Nykøbing, Denmark. We want to visit the places that formed our ancestor’s faith. In a sense it is a type of pilgrimage.

During the Advent season we are invited through the hymns and carols we sing to take us back to the first Christmas where Jesus was born. In ancient Jewish faith, the Jews made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the Passover wherever possible. As 21st century Christians we take a pilgrimage each Advent to reflect on the miracle of God becoming man as a baby. We listen to the angels, marvel with the shepherds, follow the star to the manger where our Saviour was born to be the King of the World. Every Christmas we relive and celebrate the moment when God sent His Son to earth as a baby to grow as a human and die for our sins.

The hymn talks about the faithful. Take a moment to reflect – are you one of the faithful? Do we really trust Jesus and follow Him each day? Are we faithful to Him in every aspect of our lives? Even so, God still asks us to “Come”! The hymn invites us to come and see and behold this Son of God and to sing with the angels and rejoice that He is born our Saviour. The author of this hymn is not known; however John Francis Wade is credited to it. He spent his time as a copyist for musical manuscripts found in libraries. He also used to then sign his name as his calligraphy was so beautiful. So, in 1751, this hymn was published as ‘Adeste Fideles’. Even though it was written in 1751, three hundred years later we still join together with all the faithful to sing this loved carol every Christmas.

 **Sing or listen to: O Come, All Ye Faithful**

PRAYER

*V1: 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, Christ the
Lord! Amen.*



O Little Town of Bethlehem

3rd Sunday in Advent

Read: John 1:9-10

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” Micah 5:2 (ESV)

The Civil War had just ended. It was 1865 and a young American preacher travelled to the Holy Land, and his time in Bethlehem would not just leave a memorable impact on him, but on all of Christendom. Phillips Brooks wrote a poem three years later, 1868, for his class of Sunday School children at The Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia. This was turned into the beautiful hymn and carol, ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’ by his church organist, Louis Redner who wrote the tune simply titled ‘St. Louis’. It was performed that year for the first time on Christmas Eve. In 1903, in England, another tune was set to the words; ‘Forest Green’, which is the one in our Australian Lutheran Hymnal 633.

Reading through the words of this beautiful hymn, it is easy to see what struck Brooks as he visited Bethlehem those many years ago. He must have been walking around at night looking at the sky and the stars and noting the quietness of this town. Jesus was born at night (the Bible references stars and the shepherds resting for the night). Think about it: as everyone lay sleeping, they were totally unaware that the Saviour of the World was coming to live on earth. This momentous event was happening right there among the quietness of the night. Jesus didn’t come with trumpets and fanfares, but quietly entered our world even amongst all the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Like the people of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, we can also sleep through the miracle of Jesus’ birth and never really know Him. Amongst all the clamour and noise of our society, attention can easily be pulled away from that still, small voice of a baby that asks us to come into a relationship with our eternal Father. In Jesus, our hopes and fears are stilled by the unconditional love and forgiveness of a loving Saviour. Share this love and open your homes and families to the free gift of life and salvation this Christmas. As Phillips Brooks wrote, the everlasting light is shining in the dark streets. Don’t sleep through it!

♪ Sing or listen to: O Little Town of Bethlehem

PRAYER

V1: O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by: Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight. Amen.



Mary's Boy Child



3rd Monday in Advent

Read: Luke 1:26-38

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14 (NIV)

Do you ever get the feeling that Christmas has been hijacked? That the story of Jesus' birth is told so that others can make money from the celebration of Christmas? I have always liked this Christmas Carol, it is boppy and modern. I even like the reggae version by Boney M. For this devotion I have done some digging as to its history and the meaning behind the words. Jester Hairston in 1956 wrote the tune with the calypso rhythm of 'Mary's Boy Child' with different lyrics as a birthday song, for a mostly West Indian party. It was originally titled 'He Pone and Chocolate Tea', pone being a type of corn bread. (This was never recorded).

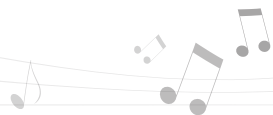
Sometime later, he was asked to write a new Christmas Song and remembered this calypso rhythm, so wrote new lyrics for it. Since then, this song has been sung and performed by Harry Belafonte, Boney M., Andy Williams, Mahalia Jackson, Anne Murray, The Little River Band, Tom Jones, John Denver, Harry Connick Jr, The Bee Gees, Hi-5, The Wiggles and probably about twenty others. What is it about this Christmas carol that has captured the talents of all of the above and more? I would like to think it is the lyrics about the birth of Jesus, but the tune is adapted and changed to suit each of the above people's styles, and each have made it their own.

I watched some of the Boney M. music video, and was somewhat disappointed to see spaceships, strange settings and people playing in the snow. There were a couple scenes of children pretending to be Mary, Joseph and the other nativity characters, but these were overshadowed by the other quirky scenes. Christmas is not about the carols and the trimmings to make it feel Christmassy; it is taking time to live and remember that Jesus came to be born on earth as a gift to humankind. Through this gift God made a covenant and promise to be with us always and bring us peace.

♪ Sing or listen to: Mary's Boy Child

PRAYER

V1: Long time ago in Bethlehem so the Holy Bible say Mary's Boy Child, Jesus Christ was born on Christmas Day. CHORUS: Hark, now hear the angels sing "New King's born today. And man will live forevermore Because of Christmas Day." Amen.





Once in Royal David's City

3rd Tuesday in Advent

Read: Psalm 2:6-12

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Mark 10:14 (NIV)

Being a primary school teacher, I know that when teaching a child, you need to talk to them in words and terms they can understand, and in concepts not too advanced without being condescending. ‘Once in Royal David’s City’ was written by Cecil Frances Alexander (1848) who wrote hymns for children as she thought it was the best way to teach the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The hymn tells the story of Jesus’ birth in storybook form and often refers to children who are to live their lives faithfully to please Jesus. This is a favourite amongst church families as it expresses this wonderful story in simple terms that children can understand. She also wrote the hymn: “All things bright and beautiful.”

The Jesus described in the Christmas carol, is relatable – he was little, weak, dear and gentle, developing as all children do. This is a huge connection with the life of Jesus in knowing that He experienced life just as we do! The beginnings of His life were not one of pomp and splendour, born to a wealthy aristocrat, but lowly, humble and laid “in a manger for His bed.” God sent His Son into a world in need. The world would not recognise Him immediately, though the wise men obviously had been informed somehow, but the happenings around His birth were obvious from the angels that this was a special baby.

The simple hymn of Cecil Frances Alexander reminds us that God came into the world as our Saviour, in a humble, meek and mild way. God became one of us and turned the world upside down when sending the Son of God to the world as King. He is present, He is near, and He is constantly concerned about all His children. Sometimes maybe we need the simplicity of a simple hymn to fully understand the truths behind His love. Not complex in theology, but pure and simple: it was in His love for you and me that God sent His Son to earth!

🎵 Sing or listen to: Once in Royal David's City

PRAYER

V3: And our eyes at last shall see Him, Through His own redeeming love, For that child so dear and gentle. Is our Lord in heaven above: And He leads His children on. To the place where He is gone. Amen.



Still, Still, Still



3rd Wednesday in Advent

Read: Psalm 19:7-10

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

Beautiful music often reflects the beauty and majesty of God. It touches our minds, hearts, and souls and gives us a glimpse of the divine. Music is a mystery of creation that reveals part of God’s infinite creativity and love for us. For three years I played flute in the Noosa Orchestra. It was a joy and a thrill for me to be a part of the orchestra. I was just one little flute, but when combined with all the violins, violas, cellos, oboe, trumpet, French horn and timpani, the result is just overwhelmingly beautiful. Each small instrument plays a big part in the beauty of the resulting music.

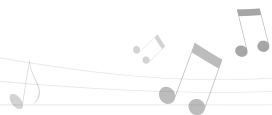
Pope Benedict XVI once observed that when words are not enough, beautiful music can express the joy and mystery of God’s love. “It is hard to find words to convey the sheer joy of the soul’s loving encounter with God; indeed, the great mystics could only remain silent before the mystery,” he said.

When researching into different Christmas carols, I came across the beautiful hymn - “Still, Still, Still”. I don’t remember singing it in church very much over Christmas, but I do remember hearing it sung by choirs and orchestras. The melody of the hymn is a folk melody from Salzburg Austria first appearing in a folksong collection by Vinzenz Maria Süß in 1865, who was the founder of the Salzburg Museum. This hymn/carol lends itself in its simplicity to a large and full sound. I found a recording of it sung and played by an Austrian choir and orchestra. In the angelic rendition sung by this Austrian choir, I could imagine the shepherds and animals and those coming to the manger in quietness to marvel at the Son of God. The words describe the peace of the baby Jesus and his mother as the baby is sung to sleep. Find a recording (maybe the one I heard) and just sit and listen and thank God that He sent His Son to earth for each one of us. We all play a part in God’s story.

♪ Sing or listen to: Still, Still, Still

PRAYER

*V1: Still, still, still, He sleeps this night so chill! The Virgin’s tender arms enfolding,
Warm and safe the Child are holding, Still, still, still, he sleeps this night so chill.
Amen.*





Joy to the World

3rd Thursday in Advent

Read: Psalm 98

“The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.” Psalm 98:2 (NIV)

Sometimes we assume that because a song is classed as a Christmas Carol that it was written especially for Christmas. That is not the case for this Christmas Carol – ‘Joy to the World’. I don’t think that a Christmas has gone by for me without having sung this carol at least once (more than likely many more times). “Since the 20th century, ‘Joy to the World’ has been the most-published Christmas hymn in North America. As of December 2009, it was published in 1387 hymnals in North America.” [Wikipedia]

But it wasn’t written as a Christmas hymn. In 1719, Englishman Isaac Watts wrote it as a Christian interpretation of Psalm 98 and Genesis 3:17-19. It was not written to depict the birth of Jesus but rather concentrated on the second coming. The tune used usually with this carol is from an 1848 edition by Lowell Mason’s ‘Antioch’, but it has also been attributed to George Handel. This hymn was first played during the Christmas season – maybe that is why it is classed a Christmas carol.

God brought the first ‘Joy to the World’ when He sent His Son as a baby in Bethlehem, but our second ‘Joy to the World’ happens when our Lord and Saviour comes for the second and final time to redeem all people. This makes this hymn a great Advent hymn as it reminds us to keep our eyes on the imminent return of Jesus, both at Christmas and throughout the year. Read the words to the hymn with new eyes. The church needs to sing for joy to God for Jesus is coming! We are to be prepared. We are to look forward to a world without sin and curse any longer. We are to be filled with His truth and grace by which He rules. We are to be awed with the wonder of His love. Our Lord has come, and He is coming again!

♪ Sing or listen to: Joy to the World

PRAYER

V1: Joy to the World; the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King! Let ev’ry heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature sing. V4: He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove. The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love. Amen.



Infant Holy, Infant Lowly



3rd Friday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:7, 12, 16

“I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” Isaiah 1:2b-3 (NIV)

There are many things about a child’s birth that we remember, and some that we choose to forget. I am an avid believer in the blessing that God gave to mothers in a short-term memory loss when it comes to childbirth, otherwise I truly believe every couple would only have one child. I do remember the baby shower given to me for my first child. Surrounded by family and friends, celebrating with me the upcoming birth of a new little child. Gifts were given, games were played, and amazing blue and pink food enjoyed. Overall, the event concentrated on and celebrated the new life coming.

The Christmas carol for today – ‘Infant Holy, Infant Lowly’ concentrates on the wonder of this new baby, born in a stable, placed in a manger, and celebrated by the animals and low in society (shepherds). This beautiful carol talks of what happened in the stable in the most beautiful way. This was originally a Polish carol thought to be written by Piotr Poweski (1532-1612). He was a tutor, Catholic priest and missionary who wrote this carol ‘W żłobie leży’ (in Polish) just a few months before his death. Edith Margaret Gellibrand Reed was able to translate it in 1920 to the carol we have today. It originally had a Polish tune, but Joseph Herl in the early 2000s wrote the music that we know today.

The word manger is mentioned 3 times in Luke – it was obviously an important detail. But it was also foretold by Isaiah 700 years earlier in the above Bible verse. It was in this humble setting that Mary wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a wooden or stone manger – which was an animal’s feeding trough - not a normal child’s crib, and certainly not an appropriate one for the Messiah. In the Isaiah text we can look deeper and see that the ox and donkey knew their ‘owner’s manger’, but the people of Israel remained clueless to God’s child coming in Bethlehem. Will you recognise the Saviour born this Christmas for you?

 **Sing or listen to: *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly***

PRAYER

V1: Infant Holy, Infant Lowly, For his bed a cradle stall; Oxen lowing, little knowing Christ the child is Lord of all. Swiftly winging, Angels singing, Bells are ringing, Tidings bringing: Christ the child is Lord of all! Christ the child is Lord of all! Amen.



Little Donkey

3rd Saturday in Advent

Read: Luke 2:4-7

***“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
Zechariah 9:9 (NIV)***

What do you call a donkey with one leg and a bad eye? *A winkey wonkey donkey.*

Why didn't the donkey cross the road? *He saw what happened to the zebra.*

Where in the Bible does it say that Mary and Joseph travelled on a donkey to Bethlehem? Nowhere! We can read in Luke that they travelled to Bethlehem from Nazareth, a journey of 145 km. They could have walked or ridden a camel. So how do we come up in most Christmas Nativity plays that Mary rides on a donkey to Bethlehem? It was a long journey and Mary was heavily pregnant and donkeys were quite prevalent, I think we like to think that Mary didn't have to walk the whole way. Maybe there is also the association of thirty-three years later Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem as King on Palm Sunday (Zechariah 9:9).

The Christmas Carol 'Little Donkey' was a one-hit-wonder by a British songwriter Eric Boswell in 1959. He wrote many other pieces of music about his home area in Britain, but none made it as big as this simple tune. It is a popular one to perform with children's musicals and nativity plays. When Eric Boswell was wanting to write a simple song for Christmas, he decided to focus on the treasure that the donkey was carrying to Bethlehem.

Christmas can be a time of worries – family, presents, celebrations, food, and the list continues. Mary and Joseph had worries of their own in trying to get to Bethlehem before census day and before their baby was born... I rather feel they had more issues than us! Were their cares and worries gone with the birth of the baby? Maybe they didn't focus on them immediately, but having Herod out to kill them might have later become real. As the song says this donkey carried Mary safely... our loving Saviour also carries us with our issues and burdens. Celebrate and enjoy a Christmas filled with joy at the birth of the little Jesus.

 **Sing or listen to: Little Donkey**

PRAYER

*Little donkey, little donkey had a heavy day. Little donkey carry Mary safely on her way.
Little donkey, little donkey on the dusty road. There are wisemen waiting for a sign to bring them here. Do not falter, little donkey there's a star ahead. It will guide you, little donkey to a cattle shed. Amen.*



O Holy Night



4th Sunday in Advent

Read: Job 38:4-7

“After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.” Matthew 2:9 (NIV)

According to legend, a Christmas song once brought peace to a battlefield. It happened on Christmas Eve during the Franco-German War (1870-1871) as the two sides faced each other in their trenches.

A French soldier jumped up and began singing “O Holy Night.” The surprised German soldiers did not fire. Instead, one of them stepped forward to sing ‘From Heaven Above To Earth I Come.’ For a brief time at least, peace on earth prevailed and goodwill was shared among men whose job it was to kill each other.

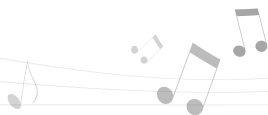
This hymn has its origin in the mid-1800s in France, when the composer Placide Cappeau was asked to write a poem about the birth of Jesus according to Luke 2. He had his Jewish friend Adolphe Charles Adams help him with the music. The French people initially accepted the carol, but Cappeau became influenced by socialist propaganda and walked away from his faith. Due to Cappeau’s stance, the song caused controversy in the Catholic church, to the point where it was banned. But John Sullivan Dwight (a political activist) heard this hymn and music in America. He changed the words a bit, but realising the slavery issue in America, he could relate to the third verse: *“Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother”*.

With understanding the history of this hymn: through a man who lost his faith, a Jewish man who composed the music, an American abolitionist, God still managed to get His message of the night when Christ was born to the world! It reminds us that baby Jesus was born into the political unrest of the time, but we can still focus and love all of humankind through Jesus’ example. It tells us to *“fall on our knees...”* in awe of the wonder that God sent to earth in a tiny baby. The true meaning of Christmas can shine out with the stars that point us to the Saviour of the world!

♪ Sing or listen to: O Holy Night

PRAYER

V1: O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear Saviour’s birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born! O night divine! O night, O night divine! Amen.





Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

4th Monday in Advent

Read: Matthew 1:20b-23

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.’” Luke 2:13-14 (NIV)

My mother is a wonder at poetry and can recite the most obscure and funny poems that she learned at primary school in the 1930's. One such poem she quoted:

Hark, hark! The lark at heaven's gate sings, And Phoebus 'gins arise, His steeds to water at those springs, On chaliced flowers that lies; And winking Mary-buds begin to ope their golden eyes: With everything that pretty is, My lady sweet, arise: Arise, arise. (By William Shakespeare)

The word ‘Hark!’ is an old English term meaning ‘to listen’. In our Lutheran Hymnal there are 5 hymns beginning with the word ‘Hark’ - obviously something important is about to be said. In the hymn ‘Hark! The Herald angels sing’, the second line tells us what is so important “Glory to the new-born king”, and this is repeated in the refrain each time – just in case you weren’t listening the first time. The fourth line states “God and sinners reconciled”. The word ‘sin’ and ‘sinner’ are not the words people like to hear. But originally it was an archery term that referred to the distance between the bull’s eye and where the arrow landed on the target. So basically ‘sin’ meant ‘to miss the perfect mark’. In God’s terms, sin means to miss the mark of God’s perfection. We were born that way... but the Good News is that God didn’t leave us that way – He sent His Son to earth for us!

This hymn is full of imagery. Written by Charles Wesley (1707-1788), he cleverly wrote the three verses telling in verse one, **WHY** Jesus came and **TO WHOM** He came. No wonder the angels were so excited! Verse two tells us **WHO** Jesus is. Try to list all the descriptions: He is the everlasting Lord, offspring of a virgin’s womb, God with flesh and bones, Immanuel. Verse three tells us **HOW** the Christ child made eternal life available to all of humankind. He gave up His heavenly position to come to earth as a man and then gave His life so that we could be born a second time and live with God eternally in heaven.

♪ Sing or listen to: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

PRAYER

V3: 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 man 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 new-born King. Amen.



Silent Night



Christmas Eve

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7

“This is how God showed his love among us: he sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” 1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

At every Christmas Eve service since I can remember I think that the beautiful hymn ‘Silent Night, Holy Night’ ends the night and people quietly walk out of church and to their homes. The song is so well-known, and I don’t think any carols evening is complete without it – secular or sacred. Both the words and tune blend into a feeling that Christ is truly present, and we are singing Him a lullaby.

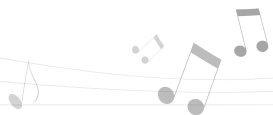
This popular Christmas carol was composed in 1818 by Joseph Mohr, a Roman Catholic priest of Austria. Joseph Mohr began his life in very humble circumstances. In 1792 he was born in Salzburg, Austria to a poor spinster knitter. His father, Franz Joseph Mohr deserted the family when Joseph was quite young. As a child, Joseph developed a friendship with the local cathedral organ master who taught him music, art and history. This organ master, Johann Hiernle recognized Joseph’s musical talents and enrolled him in the famous grammar school in Kremsmunster, Upper Austria. He finally completed his education at the seminary in Salzburg and was ordained as priest in 1815. He was 23 years old.

Joseph’s first parish was in the mountains of Austria where one morning he sat and wrote the poem: ‘Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!’ (‘Silent Night! Holy Night!’) Several years later Joseph met and became friends with Franz Xaver Gruber, who was the schoolmaster and organist of St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria. On the evening of 24 December 1818 – history itself is not clear, but it is said that the organ of St. Nicholas was broken and could not be repaired in time for Christmas so Joseph came up with the idea of putting his poem to music so it could be sung by the choir. Franz Gruber wrote the melody and Joseph Mohr transcribed the words to one of the most popular Christmas carols, Christmas Eve 1818. That night ‘Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!’ was heard and sung for the first time in St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria. Reflect on the words as you sing it this Christmas and pray that all may recognise this beautiful gift from God.

 ***Sing or listen to: Silent Night, Holy Night***

PRAYER

V1: 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. Amen.





Away in a Manger

Christmas Day

Read: Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:6-7 (NIV)

The nativity play was going as planned and Joseph and Mary were going from house to house knocking on the doors and asking if there was any room for them. As they continued to get “no room” answers a little voice called from the back “YOU SHOULD HAVE BOOKED!”

The hymn, ‘Away in a Manger’ is sung at every carol’s evening or nativity play that I have ever been to. Did you sing it last night for Christmas Eve? Or this morning celebrating the birth of our Lord? This hymn points to the manger as the source of our adoration and joy. God’s Son being born in a manger – an animal’s feeding trough – highlights the way that God uses our deepest pain, our humiliation, the things that we wish were different, the despised and the forgotten, to bring Him the greatest glory.

Jesus was not laid in a manger by accident. Animals go to the manger for physical food, but with Jesus lying on the hay, we can go to the manger for spiritual food. Jesus has peace and love, patience and hope available for all. We can come to Him at any time and never go hungry with His infinite storehouse of nourishment available to any who ask.

The hymn has long been attributed to Martin Luther, as it appeared in publications from 1882 as ‘Luther’s Cradle Song’ saying that he composed it to sing to his children. But more likely it was written to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Luther’s birth, as there is nothing in Luther’s writings which refer to or correspond to this carol. No matter who claims authorship, the beauty of this hymn is the beauty of Christmas as it speaks of the miracle of Jesus’ birth. It is a beautiful petition to grow closer to the Lord Jesus and for blessings upon all our little ones.

♪ Sing or listen to: Away in a Manger

PRAYER

V3: 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 take us to heaven, to live with Thee there. Amen.



Good King Wenceslas



26th December

Read: Titus 3:4-8, 14

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 2:21 (NIV)

On the 26th December (Saint Stephen’s Day), a Bohemian king (modern day Czech Republic) went on a journey through the snowy and harsh winter to provide for (give alms to) poor peasants. With his servant the king struggles against the cold weather, and the servant is about to give up, but the king tells him to place his feet into his footsteps and so together they go step by step through the deep snow. Wenceslaus I (the original spelling), 907-935, was not a king but rather a much-loved Duke of Bohemia in the 10th century. He was a kind man who had compassion to all, even earning the nickname ‘the father of all the wretched’.

Wenceslaus I was eventually sainted by the church after he suffered a martyr’s death. The Holy Roman Emperor Otto I also declared Wenceslaus a king posthumously and made him the patron saint to the Czech Republic. (This is not the same person who actually held the title King Wenceslas I of Bohemia who reigned 3 centuries later.) In Prague there is a statue of Saint Wenceslas on horseback which can be found in Wenceslas Square.

John Mason Neale wrote about this story in his lyrics to this beautiful Christmas carol in 1853. Even though this carol does not tell of the story of Jesus, nevertheless it does share the story of a person who made himself lowly, being a monarch, to help those less fortunate than he. He stepped out into the cold of the world to bring comfort, not just in words but in his actions, giving food, help and money to help those less fortunate. This truly is the essence of Jesus coming to earth as a lowly baby. God sent His Son to earth not as a king to rule, but as a man to help, heal and comfort those in need. As the servant stepped in the King’s footprints so we also step in Christ’s example. This Christmas season remember how blessed we have been and find some time to also bless others in need.

♪ Sing or listen to: Good King Wenceslas

PRAYER

V5: In his master’s steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted; Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed. Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank possessing, Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing. Amen.



While Shepherds Watched

27th December

Read: Luke 2:8-14

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.” Luke 2:8 (NIV)

In the six verses of this carol the whole of the story of the shepherds and the angels is told from Luke 2:8-14. Read it from the Bible again and then listen to the carol. This carol is attributed to the Irish poet Nahum Tate, and it was the only Christmas hymn authorised to be sung in the Anglican Church before the 1700's. Before that only the Psalms of David were allowed to be sung; maybe due to its retelling of the shepherds meeting with the angels from the Bible.

Shepherding is actually the first profession that the Bible mentions – “Abel was a keeper of sheep...” (Genesis 4:2). It was dangerous work where they had to protect the sheep from predators, finding grass and water and making sure that all the sheep were safe and none strayed. Shepherds were also considered society's outsiders. Ceremonially unclean, they were not permitted to worship in the Temple and their character was questionable and so any testimony was inadmissible in court. Yet this carol reminds us that God has a way of turning the social order upside-down. Sometimes the world's outsiders are considered God's insiders.

Those that were unclean and not allowed to give testimony were the first that God told the news of Jesus' birth, and they were charged with telling the world of this history-altering news. Their testimony was listened to throughout the town of Bethlehem. All through Jesus' ministry he reached out and touched those whom society had rejected. This beautiful carol tells of the birth of God's Son. This is life-altering news. Let's not keep it to ourselves but use Jesus' example and step out of society's norms and share the Gospel like the shepherds so long ago, with all who will listen. Turn this world upside-down and inside-out with the incredible love of a loving God.

♪ Sing or listen to: While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

PRAYER

V3: 'To you, in David's town this day Is born of David's line A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord; And this shall be the sign:' V6: 'All glory be to God on high, And to the earth be peace; Good-will henceforth from heaven to men Begin and never cease.' Amen.



What Child is This?



28th December

Read: Hebrews 1:1-9

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”
Luke 1:35 (NIV)

The birth of a child is miraculous in itself; waiting nine months and then this little person emerges into the world. But the birth of Jesus was a special event on a special night. It was accented by the stench of a stable, the invasion of heavenly armies, the adoration of lowly shepherds and great kings from the east. How could Mary and Joseph process all this? They even had a direct line of contact to God through the visiting of an angel, but still their question would be: What child is this?

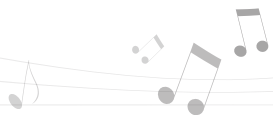
This involves the unknown; the Eternal God coming to be a part of our world. They had the prophecies, but still all was scary and new. As Jesus’ life unfolded over the next 33 years, that question was answered. The birth of Jesus paled in comparison to all the miracles, stories and healings that Jesus performed. William Chatterton Dix, the writer of this carol, knew that as amazing as the birth of Jesus was, it was incomplete without Jesus’ finished work on the cross. It was the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of new life and victory over the grave. *“Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you. Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the Babe, the Son of Mary.”* Christmas needs Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

‘What Child is This?’ we sing! Jesus was full of the majesty and the mystery of His Father and had been tasked to perform the greatest rescue plan of all time. But all of this would develop in time, for in that stable, on that amazing night, this child was a great and awesome mystery. The answer to the question: What child is this? – *“This, this is Christ the King,”* the Son of God and we have come to worship Him. *“So bring him incense, gold and myrrh. Come peasant, king, to own him. The King of Kings salvation brings. Let loving hearts enthrone Him.”* Jesus is God in the flesh. He is ours and we are His!

♪ Sing or listen to: What Child is This?

PRAYER

V1: 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. Amen.





Angels From the Realms of Glory

29th December

Read: Psalm 95:1-7

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.” Matthew 2:2 (NIV)

James Montgomery (1771-1854) wrote this firstly as a poem on Christmas Eve in 1816, after reading the story of Jesus’ birth in Luke 2. As James was the editor of the Sheffield Iris newspaper in England, this is where he published this poem. A blind songwriter and organist, Henry Smart (1813-1879), in 1867 wrote the melody ‘Regent Square’ as a musical score to Montgomery’s poem. This hymn has such a magical tune, and the words just flow into praise and worship for the birth of our Saviour. I imagine that James Montgomery must have wondered about the nativity story and God’s part in each of it, which directed him to focus each verse on a different part.

Montgomery had a difficult life. He was born in Scotland, but 7 years later his parents left to be missionaries in the West Indies and they left James in a Moravian Community in Ireland and then in a school in England. He did not have a happy life and his marks at school showed his unhappiness, and when his parents died when he was 12, he left school and was a vagabond on the streets. But God had a plan for this young boy. He loved poetry which he sold on the streets of London and in his wanderings, he finally gained employment with a newspaper – the Sheffield Register. At the age of 23, James became the editor, changed the name of the newspaper to the Sheffield Iris, and now had a platform for his poetry. He became very wealthy and widely respected in the community as he became a supporter of the British Bible Society.

Why do I share this story of hard beginnings for a young boy? We may not know the plans of God nor why certain situations occur, but we do know that God can work through hardships to bring about blessings. God’s Son was born in hard circumstances and grew to be the Saviour of the world. This Christmas season reflect on your life and the blessings God has bestowed on you, on your family on the wider community. Let us ‘Worship Christ, the new-born King.’

♪ Sing or listen to: Angels, From the Realms of Glory

PRAYER

V1: Angels, from the realms of glory, Wing your flight o’er all the earth; Ye who sang creation’s story, Now proclaim Messiah’s birth: Come and worship, Come and worship, Worship Christ, the new-born king. Amen.



Deck the Halls



30th December

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

I like to ‘deck the halls’ of my house every Christmas. I put out all the Christmassy things, all of the Christmas nativities, and hang a holly wreath on the outside doors of the house. During this time, I pack away the other decorations I have out and just try to have all things Christmas. Is this what it means to ‘deck the halls’? Can we also ‘deck the halls’ in our hearts and lives? Reading through the Colossians passage above, I read it as decking the personal parts of my life. As we come to the end of another year and look to the beginnings of a New Year, how do you want to ‘deck the halls’ of your life?

This Christmas carol does not mention the story of Jesus, but there are Christian implications to the holly. This is one plant in the northern hemisphere during the snowy times that does not seem to be affected by the cold. It looks fresh all year round – not just seasonally. It can relate to Jesus in the red berry that it bears (Mary bore Jesus), but more interestingly it relates to Easter, with the red berry symbolising the blood of Jesus, the thorny parts of holly being the crown of thorns placed on Jesus’ head. Christmas is now over and the next big season in the church is Easter. The baby Jesus soon turns into the man Jesus walking to the cross for our salvation.

‘Deck the Halls’ is a very happy and lively carol with the “fa-la-la” coming between each line and sung dozens of times. The lyrics were written by the Scottish musician Thomas Oliphant in 1862. The melody is of Welsh origin and can be traced back to the 16th century and a song called ‘Nos Galan’ which is about New Year’s Eve. If you happen to sing this song over Christmas, relate it to your life and decking yourself out personally for the New Year. In which parts of your life could you more imitate Jesus? Reflect on this and read the Colossians verses again. Let’s decorate our lives!

 **Sing or listen to: Deck the Halls**

PRAYER

V1: Deck the hall with boughs of holly, ‘Tis the season to be jolly, Don we now our gay apparel, Troll the ancient Christmas carol, V3: Fast away the old year passes, Hail the new, ye lads and lasses! Sing we joyous all together, Heedless of the wind and weather. Amen.



We Wish You a Merry Christmas

New Year's Eve (31st December)

Read: Ephesians 4:20-32

***“... to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”
Ephesians 4:24 (NIV)***

One of the favourite desserts at Christmas is a traditional plum pudding with lots of warm custard. The plum pudding dessert at Christmas dates back to around the 16th century in England as a steamed cake full of spices, raisins and currants and soaked in brandy. If it contains figs it is termed 'figgy pudding'. The singing of 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' goes back to the carolling of English peasants going to the wealthy families to basically sing for their pudding as one verse states: "We won't go until we get some".

I love Christmas and it would be interesting to count how many times you hear this carol over the Christmas season – music played while shopping, at the carol's evenings, Christmas in the Domain, etc. How many times have you said the words: 'Merry Christmas' and 'Happy New Year'? What does it really mean to you when you say it or is it just a phrase to say when you don't know what else to say? A 'merry' Christmas to me is one filled with fun, festivity and enjoyment with family and friends and also remembering who came at the first Christmas – baby Jesus. The one thing this song forgets is to mention the one who gave us the first Christmas, the loving God who sent His Son to earth to bring us joy and peace to enjoy with family and friends.

As we celebrate the year gone by and the New one beginning tomorrow – I wish you a 'Happy New Year'. Whatever this New Year brings may we remember the God of love who is with us as we journey from the old to the new. The verse in Ephesians tells us to rid ourselves of the old self with all the history to it and to instead look forward to and put on the new self, concentrating on the future. Our future life, our New Year is filled with possibilities, fill it with all that is good and allow God to permeate this new life.

♪ Sing or listen to: We Wish You a Merry Christmas

PRAYER

V1: We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Good tidings we bring to you and your kin; We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. Amen.



I Saw Three Ships

New Year's Day (1st January)

Read: Psalm 107:20-31

“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his faithful love. Let them give thanks for the wonderful things he does for people.” Psalm 107:31 (NIRV)

When I think of ships I think of the days in my early twenties when I was a crew member on a 44ft yacht sailing off the South Australian coast. I used to sail every Sunday afternoon and sometimes other days when we raced off of Outer Harbour. It is exhilarating but also can be perilous as once or twice I almost fell overboard in great swells on the open ocean. My American nephew has also just returned from a 5-month sailing expedition from the Philippines to the Solomon Islands with lots of stories to share. But sailing is not something one usually equates with Christmas. So why ‘Three Ships’?

Bethlehem is landlocked and so to see three ships from Bethlehem would be crazy. So, what could these ‘three ships’ symbolise? This English Christmas carol was first published in 1666. This was a time of exploration and discovery, and the British were fascinated with the sea and sailing. So, comparing the birth of Jesus to ships coming into port would have been understood at that time, also conveying the extreme excitement that would have been felt by all at the birth of Jesus. Another thought suggested that the ‘three ships’ were the three camels ridden on by the three wise men as camels were referred to as ‘ships of the desert’.

Today is New Years Day. A day of thoughts as to what the New Year will hold and also thoughts reflecting on the past year. Wherever you will be figuratively sailing this year, keep another three in mind: God sent His loving Son to us in a little baby to bring us salvation and the Holy Spirit helps and guides us through all situations. Ships use navigation to guide – as Christians our navigation is to follow in the steps of Jesus and live as he lived. May your ‘ship’ be guided through the year knowing our final destination – life forever with our Heavenly Father.

♪ Sing or listen to: I Saw Three Ships

PRAYER

*V1: I saw three ships come sailing in On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
I saw three ships come sailing in On Christmas Day in the morning.*

*V7: And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing, On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing, On Christmas Day in the morning. Amen.*



God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

2nd January

Read: Hebrews 2:14-18

“But the angel said to them, ‘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 Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.’” Luke 2:10-11 (NIV)

‘God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen’ is thought to be about 700 years old. During that time many of the masses would have been illiterate and this would have been one way to teach them the Christian meaning of Christmas. This song would have been a teaching tool to spread the Word of God. Many of the words in this carol mean something different than they did back in that time. The word ‘rest’ meant ‘keep’; ‘merry’ was a strong or mighty individual. So, using this context the title of the song changes from ‘God rest Ye merry, Gentlemen’ to the more modern translation of ‘May God keep you gentlemen strong.’ In this translation it can be viewed as a type of blessing.

“During this period, the songs of organised religion were usually written in Latin and their melodies were sombre and dark, offering singers and listeners little inspiration or joy ... So, while they continued to go to worship, they created their own church music outside the walls of the cathedrals and chapels. In this way, the peasant class led a quiet rebellion against the tone of religious music by writing religious folk songs that were light, lively and penned in common language.” [Ace Collins] Our brothers and sisters 500 years ago were seeking joy and light in darkness!

This was one of the most popular carols sung at Christmastime in that time in history, being used as a song that was sung out on the streets of England. It was first published in 1883 but was sung on the streets much before that; the author of the carol is unknown. It tells the story of the Nativity from the birth of Jesus to the shepherds and the angels and then the worship and adoration of the new-born child. Even though the Christmas season is almost over, we can find joy, rest and peace in the midst of the chaos of life. May God keep all you people strong!

♪ Sing or listen to: God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

PRAYER

V1: God rest ye merry, gentlemen Let nothing you dismay Remember, Christ, our Saviour was born on Christmas day To save us all from all from Satan's power When we were gone astray O tidings of comfort and joy, Comfort and joy O tidings of comfort and joy. Amen.



Carol of the Bells



3rd January

Read: Isaiah 40:1-11

“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.” Isaiah 40:4 (NIV)

This song was written to originally welcome the New Year as a Ukrainian Folk song called ‘Shchedryk’, translated as ‘The Little Swallow’. It tells of a swallow who flies into a household to proclaim the plentiful year that will come the following spring. Mykola Leontovych arranged the song in 1916 and in 1922 Peter J. Wilhousky wrote the English lyrics, giving it more of a Christmas focus. Listening to the song, especially an acapella version with 5-part harmonies, one can hear the bells welcoming the new year and bringing good cheer to a cold European winter. During the Christmas season we share love and peace and hope with each other. We join in the festivities of the seasons – parties, dinners, BBQs, fellowship and family time. There can be though, after all have gone home and the Christmas festivities are over, some post-Christmas blues. We look to another year, but what does it hold for each of us?

Sometimes I am actually overwhelmed during Christmas and look forward to some down time in January, but then I look back and wish I had done more. I can get despondent and wonder when the family will be together again and share the fun times again. That is where HOPE comes in. You cannot have Christmas and Jesus without hope. The hope of a new-born and all the things He will do and achieve through His life. This song reminds us of the hope and joy of Christmas. The bells and running tune can’t help but bring a smile to the heart.

During difficult times, I listen to songs with hopeful lyrics to bolster my soul. The original version of this song was composed during the most hopeless time – the first World War. ‘Carol of the Bells’ was written to bring hope to a despairing people. God gave his only Son to bring us hope at Christmas. The world can easily get us down or bring us despair, but Jesus came so that we can live. As we go through this year, keep hope alive in your hearts.

 **Sing or listen to: Carol of the Bells**

PRAYER

V1: Hark! How the bells Sweet silver bells All seem to say ‘throw cares away’. Christmas is here Bringing good cheer To young and old Meek and the bold.

V2: Ding, dong, ding dong That is their song With joyful ring All carolling One seems to hear Words of good cheer. From ev’rywhere Filling the air. Amen.



Little Drummer Boy

4th January

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:20-31

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

Caleb, a little boy in the town of Bethlehem, heard that a special baby had been born in a stable. He used to go out into the fields and play his little drum to any who would listen – mostly animals. He had heard his parents scoffing as they told of the baby Jesus’ birth. These people, Mary and Joseph, were so poor they couldn’t even afford to stay in a hotel. How special can a baby be who is born and put in the feeding trough of animals? Nevertheless, little Caleb set out in search of finding this baby, taking with him his little drum. He went in, out and around the streets of Bethlehem searching for a stable. But which stable, there were so many. In his search he came across these beautifully dressed men leading camels. Thinking they might know where this little ‘king’ was, Caleb followed at a distance.

Finally, on the other edge of town, was a popular inn and a stable for the inn’s patrons. The men with camels went into the stable and knelt down in front of a manger. “What were they doing?”, Caleb thought. The parents, Mary and Joseph were there as well as lots of animals and a couple shepherds. Not much of a place for a king! The important men took out some gifts – they looked so expensive and put them by the manger telling Mary that they were for her little ‘king’. Caleb crept closer and saw this baby – there was a radiance that shone around him. Caleb started playing his drum. He wanted to give the baby something, like the important people had, but he had nothing but his drum. He played quietly and the baby turned and looked straight at Caleb. The baby smiled.

Little Caleb had nothing, all he had was himself and he laid it before the baby Jesus. God loves you so much. He doesn’t want riches or a portion of what you can give. He desires all of you and the gifts you give from the heart!

 **Sing or listen to: Little Drummer Boy**

PRAYER

V3: Mary nodded Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum. The ox and lamb kept time Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum. I played my drum for him Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum. I played my best for him Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum. Rum-pum-pum-pum, Rum-pum-pum-pum. Then he smiled at me Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum. Me and my drum. Amen.



As With Gladness Men of Old



5th January

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

***“Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’”
Matthew 2:1b-2 (NIV)***

William Chatterton Dix was ill. He had been suffering for months and was restricted to bed. On the 6th January 1859, being unable to attend the Epiphany service at church, he decided to start writing a poem. He often wrote Christian poetry; and he was also the son of a poet – John Ross Dix. As he read the Gospel, Matthew 2:1-12, he was inspired and reflected on the text eventually resulting in ‘As With Gladness Men of Old’. In 1861, William Henry Monk adapted the tune which became popular, and Monk named the tune ‘Dix’ after the author. Dix personally did not like the tune.

This hymn is often sung at Christmas even though it is an Epiphany hymn. It is a prayer asking for God to be with us every day in every way that we may be drawn ever closer to our Lord. The Wise Men travelled in faith, and with sacrifice to see this little Christ-child. Following this example, we pray that we can also follow with such faith as we look forward to the day when we shall see Jesus face-to-face. The Wise Men took the trouble to bring costly treasures. They must have been aware of who this child they were searching for was. He was the Son of God. So also, what treasures can we offer this baby, the Son of God?

We are encouraged to live our lives as an offering to our Lord and King. The hymn points to the promises of Revelation 21-22 which describes the full life we will have with God in the new heaven and new earth. Then we will no longer need ‘created light’ because Jesus, the light of the world, will be our light. Read through the verses of this hymn/prayer again. There is so much in them and so much to ponder about our lives. God has given us so much in sending His Son Jesus to be our Saviour, He wants us to also share in the Heavenly glory that has been prepared for us.

♪ Sing or listen to: As With Gladness Men of Old

PRAYER

As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold; As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright; So, most gracious God, may we evermore be led to Thee. Amen.



We Three Kings

Epiphany (6th January)

Read: Matthew 6:19-21

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.” Matthew 2:11 (NIV)

What do you treasure? Recently I reminisced with my mother about her wedding on the anniversary of her wedding day in 1952. I have her wedding picture hanging up with all the family history pictures in our passage. I treasure that I have a history and can follow my ancestry. I was able to talk with her about her dress, veil, people who attended and what my father was wearing. We talked about the ceremony, how my father walked my mother down the aisle, not my grandfather. The cake made with all the beautiful lacing by a local lady from Keyneton, South Australia. We talked of the reception, photos, the cars and the games they played at the reception – cutting a block of chocolate with a knife and fork, balancing a balloon on a stick while walking and so on.

The stories were treasures in themselves that my mother was passing on to me. We also spoke of her dress that I also wore on my wedding day 43 years later. Stories are treasures which is why it is so important to record them. God knew that we would need the written history of the world and the plan He had to bring His Son, Jesus into the world through a virgin birth. The Bible contains history, stories and intrigue, but mostly it contains God’s love for all the world.

The carol ‘We Three Kings’ is a story of the coming of Gentiles to worship baby Jesus – God was opening His Kingdom to the whole world. John Henry Hopkins Jr. wrote both the lyrics and the music for this well-loved carol in 1857. He wrote it for a Christmas pageant and uncovered the motivation and the significance of the Wise Men’s gifts. It was a treasure that he has left the world which is sung every year at Christmas. As we end this Christmas season on Epiphany Day, resist the urge to focus only on the manger, rather give your full attention to the treasure that God has in store for us through the sending of His Son Jesus to be our Saviour. He is the perfect Light!

♪ Sing or listen to: We Three Kings

PRAYER

V1: We three Kings of Orient are, Bearing gifts we traverse afar, Field and fountain, Moor and mountain, Following Yonder star. CHORUS: O Star of Wonder, Star of Night, Star with Royal Beauty bright, Westward leading, Still proceeding, Guide us to thy perfect Light. Amen.





Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonder of music and song. For the gifts of so many who have written songs and music for the world to enjoy and celebrate over the Christmas season. I praise you for opening the story of your love for the world in sending your precious and Only Son into the world as a baby. This gift ultimately has brought me salvation through this baby born to be Saviour of the world.

Guide me through the coming year, bless my family, friends and those whom you place in my path to share your story of love. Give me courage and strength of purpose to fulfill the commission you have for my life. I praise you daily for your goodness and love.

In your Son's precious name I pray, Amen.



The background of the page is decorated with various musical notes and staves. At the top left, there are several curved staves with notes. In the center, there are a few floating notes. At the bottom, there are more staves with notes, some of which are curved and flowing across the page. The overall theme is music.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

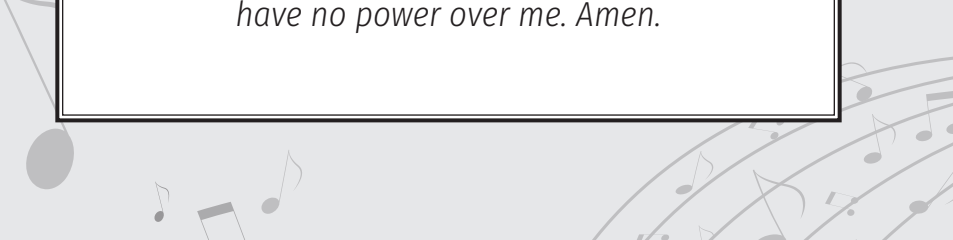


Luther's Morning Prayer

I thank you heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask you to keep me this day too, from all sin and evil, so that in all my thoughts, words and deeds I may please you. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen

Luther's Evening Prayer

I thank you, heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive all my sin and the wrong which I have done, and graciously keep me this night. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen.





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Cover: Shutterstock

