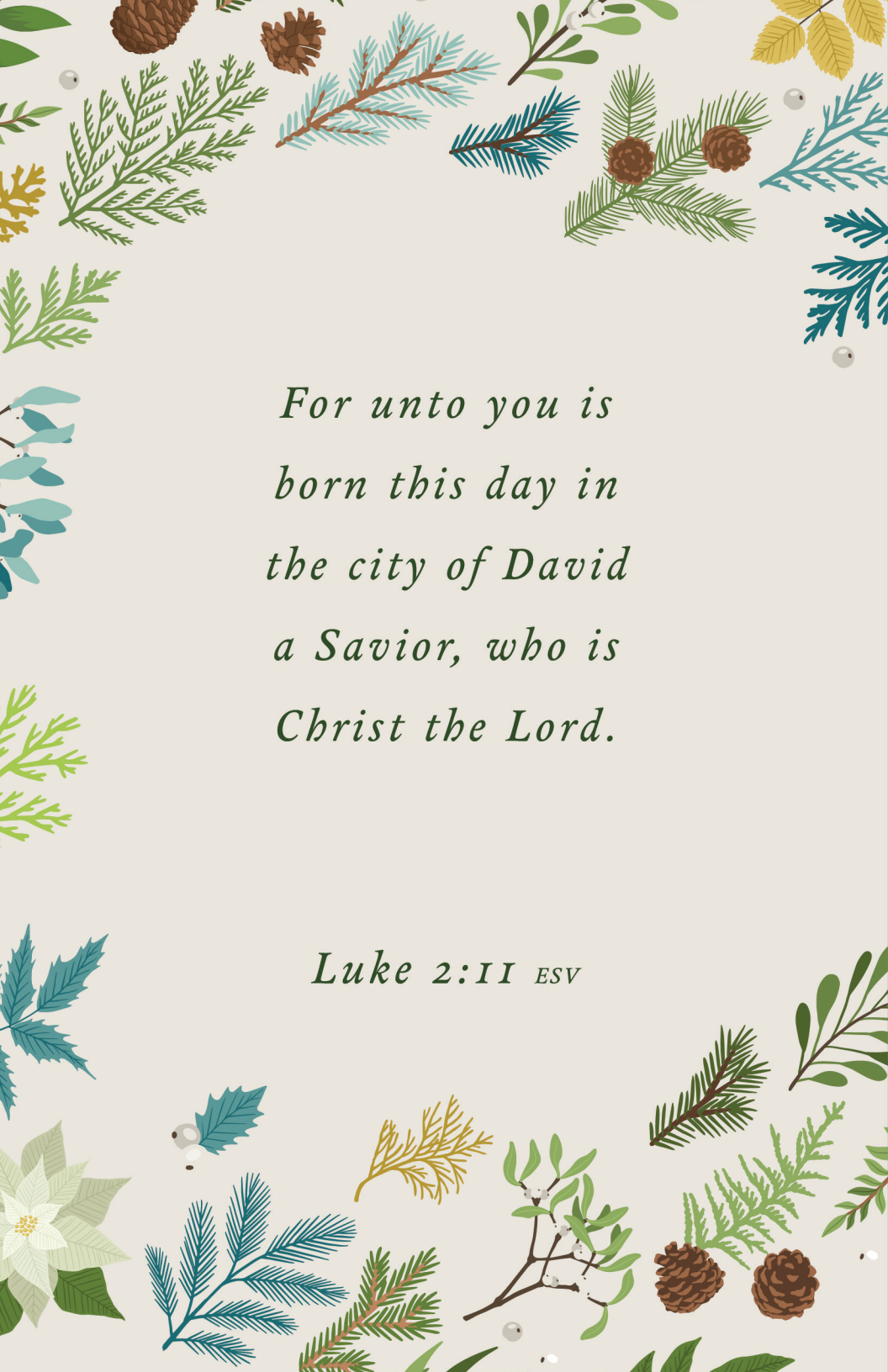


The Songs of



Christmas

BUCK RUN BAPTIST CHURCH
2023 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



*For unto you is
born this day in
the city of David
a Savior, who is
Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:11 ESV

The Songs of Christmas

A Buck Run Advent Devotional

During the Christmas season carols fill our homes, our church, and our world. The Church has long used the songs of Christmas to express powerful spiritual truths about the coming of Jesus. In this year's Advent devotional we will explore the meaning of some of our favorite Christmas songs and use the truth they convey to deepen our understanding of the gospel. Members of our church have written nine devotionals for you to read in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Each devotional includes reflection questions for both individuals and families, as well as links to videos where Buck Run members sing the songs of Christmas. We invite you and your family to sing these songs to reflect on the coming of Christ and to anticipate His return with gladness.

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Week 1

*“Glory to God in
the highest,
and on earth
peace among
those with whom
he is pleased!”*

Luke 2:14 ESV

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

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

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see;
Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

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 newborn King!"



We can thank the great evangelist, George Whitefield, that we don't sing, "Hark! How all the Welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings." Those were the original lyrics Charles Wesley wrote in 1739 in the first edition of the carol in 1739. Based on Luke 2:14, Wesley colorfully described how the heavens (that's what "Welkin" means) rang with the chorus of the angels. Fifteen years later, Whitefield, the great British preacher and friend of the Wesleys, published the song in a book of "Hymns for Social Worship." Thankfully, he tweaked the first line to the one with which we are so familiar: "Hark, the herald angels sing 'Glory to the newborn King!'"

This song presents rich, theological Gospel substance as much as any traditional Christmas carol. Not content merely to describe a baby in a manger, Wesley boldly declared that this infant came to reconcile God and sinners as the joy of the nations and the everlasting Lord adored by all of heaven. He exquisitely captured the power and purpose of the incarnation, "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!"

In so few words Wesley captures a sprawling view of eternity through the single lens of Christ's entrance into the world. Every time we sing this great carol, we join our voices to those angels. But unlike them we have the experience of grace in the Incarnate Deity who was "pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!"

– Dr. Hershael York

Reflection Questions

- What are some of your favorite Christmas songs? Why?
- How can you use the songs of Christmas to focus your heart on the Lord this season?
- Why does the coming of Jesus compel Christians to sing?

For Kids

- What is your favorite Christmas song about Jesus and why?

Joy to the World

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

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

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.

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



“Joy to the World” is the most published Christmas carol of all time. Its jubilant melody is upbeat and mirthful and will brighten the faces of all who sing it. The lyrics, written by Isaac Watts, are a call to rejoice in the coming of Christ the King, both personally and as part of His Creation as a whole. The song was not intended to be a Christmas carol, but was written as verses of hopeful worship looking forward to the second coming of Christ. When writing this song, Isaac Watts was inspired by the words of Psalm 98, which celebrate Jesus’ salvation, righteousness, and faithfulness in His role as king of the church and of the whole world! Over a century after the words were written, they were put to music and published around Christmas time, and have been sung as a Christmas carol ever since.

All of creation is called to join in celebration because of the salvation that God has worked for his people through the coming of His Son. We, the church, can celebrate God’s righteous judgment, His wondrous love, and His grace this Christmastime. We are to employ our songs to worship and exalt the King of the world!

Jesus has come and will come again making all things new. What an inspiring and comforting promise to which we can look ahead! Meanwhile, we are told to prepare room in our hearts for our King! Are you actively creating space in your life for the coming Savior? Let every heart prepare Him room!

– Susanna Fulcher

Reflection Questions

- What are some things God has done for you this year that caused you to rejoice?
- What are some characteristics of Jesus that are listed in this carol?
- Read Psalm 98 and reflect on the reasons for our joy.
- How can you prepare your heart during this Christmas season for the return of Jesus?

For Kids

- What does it mean to have joy and how does the story of Christmas give us a reason for joy?

O Come All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him
Born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord

God of God,
Light of Light;
Lo, He abhors not the Virgin's womb:
Very God,
Begotten, not created;
O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God,
Glory in the highest;
O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born; this happy morning:
Jesus to Thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing;
O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord



In 325 AD, there was a debate among church leaders regarding the relationship between Jesus and God. Arius believed that Jesus was created by God the Father, which meant that he was not eternal, infinite, or God. The second verse of the song "O Come All Ye Faithful" contains language from the outcome of those debates, specifically from the Nicene Creed.

Jesus is "God of God", "Light of Light", and "begotten, not created" because He is of the same essence as the eternal Father. Just as light comes from light, so the Son comes from the Father. This is who Jesus is: He is immeasurable, eternal, self-sufficient, omnipresent, and the second person of the Holy Trinity.

And yet, this Jesus "...emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Php. 2:7). The one who is immeasurable was once held in the arms of a mother. The one who is eternal had a birthday. The one who is self-sufficient needed his mother to feed him regularly. The one who is omnipresent could lay in a manger.

These realities of Jesus's incarnation are mind-boggling. Yet Jesus did it without ever compromising his deity. May we be left in awe of Jesus, knowing that somehow, in some way he humbled himself by taking on human flesh and dying on the cross for you and me, all for his glory.

– Kevin Dunford

Reflection Questions

- What is one thing about Jesus that causes you to adore Him?
- What regular rhythms do you have established in your home life that demonstrate your adoration of Jesus?
- How might a life of committed service to the local church demonstrate an adoration of Jesus?

For Kids

- What does it mean to adore Jesus?
- Why should we adore Jesus?
- How can you adore Jesus?



Week 2

*“An angel of the Lord
appeared to them, and
the glory of the Lord
shone around them,
and they were filled
with great fear.”*

Luke 2:9 ESV

Angels We Have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high,
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echo back their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

Shepherds why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be,
Which inspire your heavenly song?
Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

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
Gloria in excelsis Deo



Advent! 'Tis the season for singing, isn't it? All kinds of singing and songs about all kinds of things. But may we encourage to tune and filter out as much of it as you can and listen to the song of the "Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing..."!

The English adaptation as we sing it is from an 18th-century, eight-stanza French carol. We're used to singing 3-4 of those stanzas.

The story of the song is found in Luke 2:8-20, and a sweet song it is! The carol is sung in the voices of the shepherds as they responded to the visitation of first one angel who announced to the terrified shepherds "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2.11). And then, "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the Highest...'" The chorus of the carol "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" is Latin for "Glory to God in the Highest."

Have you heard this 'jubilee' song of salvation, celebration, and joy in your own heart of faith? Then take a deep breath and join us as we sing the 16-note sustained "Gloria" to the praise of the grace and gift of "Christ the Lord, the newborn King"! He is worthy to receive every note of the glory – and more.

– *Dave Parks*

Reflection Questions

- Since angels are 'messengers,' how can we continue to proclaim the good news they bore through our own singing and testimony – especially during this Advent season?
- Is our singing in worship always inspired and energized by contemplating the same Gospel truths the angels' and shepherds' were, rather than becoming merely seasonal?
- Is our awe, adoration, and joy as evident as those of the angels and shepherds?

For Kids

- How can we begin early in life to make Jesus the One we sing most about?

O Holy Night

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

O hear the angel voices!

O night divine! O night when Christ was born!

O night divine! O night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here came the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,
In all our trials born to be our friend!
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger.
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King: before Him lowly bend!

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



There's a bit of a mystery behind the authorship of this classic carol. It's not that we don't know the author, we do—his name is Placide Cappeau. It's the mystery of why he would write such a hymn. Placide, born in France in 1808, was an atheist and outspoken adversary of the church. But nonetheless, he was an accomplished poet who drew the attention of a local priest. The priest commissioned Cappeau to write a Christmas poem. Surprisingly, he agreed.

The text was so strikingly beautiful, a local Opera singer named Emily Laurie wanted it set to music. She gave it to her friend, a non-believing Jewish composer named Adolphe Adam, who created the haunting melody we all know. While the song was a hit, it was banned by the Catholic Church for its non-Christian origins. Despite this, "Cantique De Noel" continued to grow in popularity. In 1855, minister and musician John Dwight translated it into English and "O Holy Night" swept across America.

From the hardened heart of a non-believing poet, the Lord drew a song rich in gospel and glory. From the piano of a man who did not believe in Christ the Messiah, a melody that drips in awe and wonder of the advent. For us it is a reminder that we sing "fall on your knees" as a present command and a future reality. One day, every unbelieving person, every antagonist of the gospel, will fall on their knees in worship of the one true King. Sing this hymn with a solemn hope that every knee will bow, every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

– *Adrian Mathenia*

Reflection Questions

- Which line or verse resonates with you? Which lyric stirs your heart to worship?
- How should the imminence of Christ's return affect our personal evangelism?
- What scripture references can you find to support this text? (ex: "to our weakness is no stranger"—Isaiah 53:3)

For Kids

- What excites you the most about the birth of Jesus?

What Child Is This?

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.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
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.

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh:
Come peasant, king, to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the son of Mary.



The account of Jesus coming to earth as a baby and His birth in a stable is one of the most well-known in all history. This carol's rhetorical question highlights the extraordinary nature of the child. The author calls us to both ponder, "what child is this?" and to exclaim, "what child is this!" We rejoice in the unexpected humility of God the Son.

Each verse proclaims a critical part of the gospel message that Paul outlines in Philippians 2:6-11 – Jesus' incarnation, His death, and His resurrection and ascension to Heaven.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth were humble, yet angels heralded his arrival. He's Christ the King, yet He came as a helpless babe. These dichotomous pairings accentuate the shocking grace of the gospel.

In verse two we see how the eternal redemptive plan of God made possible through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is anticipated even from His birth. His purpose in taking on human flesh is evident from His cradle.

But this death is not the end. Verse three describes that while kings from afar brought gifts to the infant King, one day all will proclaim the resurrected Christ as King. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. How powerful to see these gospel truths from our vantage point two thousand years after Jesus was a babe sleeping on His mother's lap. We see clearly what child this is. The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

– Kirsten Brown

Reflection Questions

- Why is it important that Jesus came to Earth as a baby?
- How does this song capture the essence of the Gospel?
- Read Philippians 2:6-11. How does this song mirror the message of Paul?

For Kids

- What gift can you give Jesus? What gift has He given you?



Week 3

*“Behold, the
virgin shall
conceive and bear
a son, and shall
call his name
Immanuel”*

Isaiah 7:14 ESV

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

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.
Israels strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art,
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Joy to those who long to see Thee,
Dayspring from on high, appear
Come, thou promised Rod of Jesse,
Of Thy birth we long to hear!
O'er the hills the angels singing
News, glad tidings of a birth
"Go to Him, your praises bringing;
Christ the Lord has come to earth."

Come to earth to taste our sadness,
He whose glories knew no end;
By His life He brings us gladness,
Our Redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.
Leaving riches without number,
Born within a cattle stall;
This the everlasting wonder,
Christ was born the Lord of all!

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.



Can you think of something that you have waited for, until you could hardly stand to wait any longer? Maybe a family vacation that you have been dreaming of for years, the wedding of a family member, or waking up on Christmas morning. Although all these are sweet, once what we've been waiting for has passed, we can sometimes feel a little gloomy and disappointed. Charles Wesley's "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" is a Christmas song that expresses the anticipation of the arrival of a long awaited King. But even now after his coming, this song still continues in eternal rejoicing.

This hymn reminds us of the longings of Israel as they awaited the promised Messiah. This King would set them free from fear and sin, be their strength and consolation, provide them with hope, and ultimately fulfill every desire of their heart. We can join the saints of old in rejoicing because we know that this King has come to fulfill His promises, and his name is Jesus! And yet we also still wait, for we believe his promise that he will one day come again and make all things new. Are you truly longing for that day?

During this Christmas season, reflect on the fact that Jesus will return, just as he said. In a world filled with sin, death and disappointment, our hope must be fully set on him. Let us encourage one another to wait with expectancy, a longing heart, and an anticipation that one day we will be in eternity praising the God who will raise us to His glorious throne.

– Katelyn Pinkston

Reflection Questions

- How is the birth and promised return of Jesus impacting the way your family lives? How are you sharing that with those around you?
- How can you ensure that you are finding your rest in Jesus during this Christmas season?
- What words are used to describe Jesus in these lyrics? Choose one and express how you've experienced Him in that way.

For Kids

- How can your family's Christmas celebrations ultimately point you to Jesus? (ex: gifts, family gatherings, Christmas traditions)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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

O Come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory over the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” is not usually sung with the energetic tempo and the celebratory bells of most Christmas music. The Latin hymn is usually arranged in a reflective minor key, solemn and even somber from beginning to end. Yet the refrain calls us surprisingly after every single verse, “Rejoice! Rejoice!” The odd balance of joy and longing expressed in the music of this song describes the hopeful waiting of God’s people in exile.

The hymn is sung from the perspective of captive Israel who found themselves in a pagan world full of godless enemies. The song looks back at the prophecies that the Son of God, the Rod of Jesse, the breaking forth of daylight would come for the people of God.

These prophecies came true with the birth of Jesus on the first Christmas night. Jesus was the Messiah who would save His people from the depths of hell and give them victory over the grave. He was the key that opened the way for God to dwell with man.

Through the lens of Israel in exile, today’s church can sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” in anticipation of the second coming of Jesus. Our salvation is secure in Christ, but we have not yet experienced it in full. We wait with longing for our heavenly home. But we wait with hope. Rejoice! In the loneliest exile. Rejoice! In the darkest of night. Rejoice! Emmanuel will come again and will make our faith into sight.

– *Will Morris*

Reflection Questions

- What challenges are you facing now that make you long for the return of Jesus?
- What are the different titles the hymn uses to describe Jesus and what do they tell us about Him?
- How can you remind yourself to rejoice in the hope of Christ while living in a fallen world?

For Kids

- What do we mean when we call Jesus “Emmanuel” (which means God with us)?

The First Noel

The first Noel, the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel.
Born is the King of Israel.

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

And by the light of that same star
The wise men came from country far;
To seek for a king was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel.
Born is the King of Israel.

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
Who hath made heaven and earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel.
Born is the King of Israel.



“The First Noel” is a carol most of us have sung since childhood and holds a nostalgic place in our hearts in its expression of the excitement and wonder of the first Christmas. The carol dates from the 1800s, and lyrics have varied somewhat as translations occurred from earliest English versions. Surprisingly, there have been as many as nine verses, several of which we no longer sing. But a few have been preserved that share wonderfully clear statements of truth.

“Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord;
That hath made heaven and earth as naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought,”

Hallelujah! Jesus, through Whom all things in the universe were created and are upheld, and Who was with God in the beginning—and IS God—was born in a stable in Bethlehem. He was man, lived a perfect life and bought us with His blood on the cross in God’s plan for our redemption. He gave HIS blood as atonement for OUR sins.

As the carol correctly states, the angels shared this exciting news of Jesus’ birth with the shepherds; later, wise men sought Him and gave Him gifts. He is worthy of our praise! Born is the King of Israel! Happy birthday, Lord Jesus!

– *Keith Starzman*

Reflection Questions

- Is there a piece of your family’s Christmas traditions that is good, but might be “tweaked” to more clearly focus on the true meaning and importance of Christmas?
- If you were one of those following the Bethlehem star, what thing of great value would you have given to the baby Jesus?
- Why does the title “King of Israel” have meaning to us today who are living in the United States?

For Kids

- Why is it so important to celebrate Jesus’ birthday?

