FALLING SPRING CHURCH

SING IT AGAIN

TWELVE SONGS, ONE STORY



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Welcome!

Some of these songs you may have sung all your life. Others may be new to you. Either way, this Advent we invite you to sing them again, or to hear them for the first time.

Each page of this devotional was written by a member of our church family. Each one takes a Christmas song and the Scripture behind it, and shares an honest reflection on what it has meant to them. Listen to the song, read the Scripture, and let the words keep you company.

May these songs help you slow down this Advent and notice that Christ is coming to meet you.

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1. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Names for a Savior
By Pastor Tad Schuldt

> Isaiah 7:14
>
> *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*
>
> Isaiah 9:2
>
> *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."*
>
> Matthew 1:22–23
>
> *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").*

Reflection

I have always loved stories. I remember being excited to learn how in many cultures a person's name tells a story. My sister-in-law's maiden name is Fletcher, meaning her ancestors made arrows for archers. I remember a family at church naming their daughter Joy because she brings joy to everyone.

The very same is true for God. The Living God has many names by which we can know Him. Knowing a person's names deepens our connection. I love to sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" every Advent season because of all the

names we are given to know Jesus, the eternal Son, mysteriously one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The name, "Emmanuel" Brings me comfort. In Jesus, all the fullness of God has come to be WITH us! What a wonderful thing! Jesus tells us, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) Jesus fulfills our longing for intimacy with our heavenly Father. In the Holy Spirit, God is still with us today. Almighty God has drawn near and holds us close.

"Rod of Jesse" soothes my worries. Rods are a symbol of kingly authority. As the Rod of Jesse, Jesus fulfills God's promise in Isaiah to send a Savior through King David's family line to rescue all humankind from the grip of evil and injustice, and to replace evil powers with God's eternal kingdom of everlasting peace.

"Dayspring" gives me confidence. I was afraid of the dark as a child because I could not see. Jesus fulfills God's promise to bring us light to see and understand. In Jesus we become lights, drawing others in, helping each other see what is true and to know what to do.

"Key of David" fulfills my longing for value. King David symbolizes God's eternal family at its best. Jesus is not only heir to David's throne according to the flesh; he also opens the door for everyone to be adopted into God's family forever by faith. Jesus' blood shed on the cross is God's signature of adoption for us all. In Jesus, we belong.

"Desire of Nations" brings me hope. Being enemies with others is contrary to the image of God in which everyone was created. Jesus fulfills God's promise to bring reconciliation. "In Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things…by making peace through the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:20)

Reflection Questions

Which of God's names most captures your imagination? What do you long for God to resolve or heal?

Prayer

(Repeat God's names to yourself) Thank You, Lord, for being who you are. In Your name I find hope and peace. Help me to know You as You know me.

2. "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

By Laura Sponseller

> Isaiah 9:6–7
>
> *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

Reflection

Expected. We usually associate that word with something wonderful on the horizon—a new baby, perhaps, or the anticipation of Christmas morning when we get to shower our families with gifts. There is so much joy in the waiting, in the looking forward, in the expectation that builds throughout Advent. And "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" captures both beautifully: the birth of a child and the arrival of the greatest gift we could ever receive.

Of course, the Christmas season can bring some challenging expectations, too. Between the hustle and bustle, parties, finding the perfect gift, and trying to make everything happen, there can be financial and emotional pressures that weigh heavily on families. Sometimes, I wonder if the most meaningful thing we can do is simply drop the veil and be honest with the people we love.

When I was a young teenager, my family had one of those Christmases. My Dad's business, where I had worked every summer for years, was struggling. We knew things were tight, but we weren't going without. Then Christmas morning arrived, and there were no packages under the tree. Instead, each of us four kids received an envelope with a typed letter explaining that this year, we were sharing His Presence, not presents.

As a kid, that was hard to process, but it was also incredibly meaningful. I felt empathy for my parents, who simply couldn't provide the Christmas we might have expected. But through that simple letter, they reminded us of what—and really, WHO—Christmas was all about. It remains one of my most treasured Christmas memories.

During that same season, my Dad was listening constantly to Handel's Messiah and began researching the Scripture passages connected to each of its movements. Before the internet made research so easy, this was quite a Bible study! After weeks of work, he had identified the verses for all 53 movements except one. Then, as if on cue, John Brink happened to call about something unrelated. With his background in music, he rattled off the missing verse without hesitation. The final piece of the puzzle!

All these years later, we don't remember which movement was the missing piece or what my parents actually wrote in that Christmas letter. But this reflection

brought the memories full circle. For "Unto Us a Child Is Born," movement #12, in Handel's Messiah, comes directly from Isaiah 9:6–7. And somehow, that feels like the perfect bow on this memory for me.

Maybe this Advent, we can loosen our grip on some of our expectations and turn our hearts toward Him. The child born unto us. The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His Presence, not presents.

Put on Handel's "Messiah" while decorating or baking this year. See how many of the Scriptures you recognize. And in the midst of all the celebrating, make room for the One we've been waiting for all along.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the One we have been waiting for. Loosen our grip on the expectations that crowd this season, and turn our hearts toward You. Make us glad of Your presence more than any present. Amen.

3. "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

By Braden Smith

> Micah 5:2
>
> *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*
>
> Luke 2:1–7
>
> *In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was*

> *the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.*
>
> *4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

Reflection

"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"

Although this song says it was still and the stars silent, it sounds like Bethlehem was anything but "still" and "silent" in the story of Jesus' birth. Having no room at an inn means it must have been pretty crowded. A modern image I picture is last-minute shopping in the days before Christmas. Is it possible to find peace and stillness during times like this?

Amidst the chaos this season typically brings, I think it helps to focus on the little things—the seemingly insignificant or underwhelming things. Just like the little town of Bethlehem, God seems to love using the underwhelming to do something miraculous. As a kid, I always focused on the hero stories in the Bible where God gave victory, triumph, and power to relatively ordinary people. I read about God helping Moses lead his people to freedom, God giving Samson great strength, and God helping David defeat Goliath. Rereading these stories as an

adult, I notice the backstory of many of these so-called heroes, and many of them are not so impressive. Moses had a speech impediment and begged God to choose someone else. Samson was prideful and was forcefully humbled. David was a simple shepherd who was so insignificant he was not even invited with his older brothers when Samuel was looking for one of Jesse's sons to become the next king. None of these people seemed impressive on their own, much like the town of Bethlehem.

Luckily, God does not ignore the small. He builds on it and rejoices in it. Bethlehem was little, but it was important in God's plan. With God, there is no place, no person, and no thing that is too underwhelming to become something memorable and worthy of singing songs about year after year. It's the same with the madness we have this time of year. The little things will ultimately become big, important things. The letters and cookies for Santa, the carols playing on the radio, the twinkling lights on houses as we drive home, the decorating of trees, and the Christmas Eve services at church are the small moments and memories which become the things we really cherish.

Reflection Question

One question to keep in mind during this season of busyness: What small things will you recognize as one of God's little miracles?

Prayer:

Lord, help us to appreciate the small things during this season. You came in the most humble of ways, in a small town of little importance to the world. Yet in that place, our hopes of redemption, and the fears we face with our unworthiness and sin have been met with Thee that night and forever.



4. “Mary, Did You Know?”

By Elise Wright

Luke 1:26–38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on 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. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

> Luke 2:19, 34–35
>
> *19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*
>
> *34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

Reflection

Mary's story has taken on a whole new meaning for me this year as I prepare to become a mother. When Mary said "yes" to God, she had no idea what the future would hold. She decided to trust Him without knowing the full story, and I find that both comforting and challenging. I consider myself to be a "planner" and often want to know what to expect and how things will unfold in any given scenario. This pregnancy has challenged me in this way, as there truly are so many unknowns going into parenthood for the first time. Mary reminds me that faith is not about having all of the answers. Rather, it's about trusting God even when we do not have the answers.

As I await our son's arrival, I find myself experiencing so many emotions: excitement, anticipation, love… but also uncertainty about the changes and responsibilities that motherhood will bring. I wonder if Mary experienced similar feelings as she waited for Jesus' birth. Did she worry whether she would be a good mother? Did she wonder what His future would look like? I would love to ask her how she found peace in these unknowns and how she trusted God when His plan felt overwhelming.

Luke tells us that Mary treasured and pondered these things in her heart (Luke 2:19). This reminds me to slow

down and appreciate the season I am in, although my mind wants to spin about what is coming next. I want to treasure the anticipation of meeting my son, the moments of feeling him move, and the reminders that God is working in and planning his life before I ever get to hold him. I know that once he arrives, life will look very different—I do not want to overlook the beauty of this miraculous waiting season.

Mary's example reminds me that I do not need to have motherhood figured out before I begin. I can trust that God will give me what I need, one day at a time. Just as He was present with Mary, He will be present with me as I step into this new chapter. My prayer is that I will approach motherhood with faith, humility, and a willingness to trust God even when I don't have all the answers.

Reflection Question

How can we learn to treasure and find peace in the season that we are in rather than worrying about what may come next?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Mary's example of trusting You without knowing the full story. When the unknowns feel heavy, teach us to treasure the season we are in and to rest in Your care, one day at a time. Amen.

5. "Silent Night"

By Dick Mason

> Luke 2:8–14
>
> *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord*

appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

John 1:5

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Reflection

Silence. Silence seems to be tough to come by in our modern age. Noise pollution seems to surround us at every turn. Whether it is traffic noise, blasts from Letterkenny, beeps, rings, and strange noises from our cell phones, or the ubiquitous sound of a leaf blower. How often have we said: "I just want some peace and quiet."

And yet, when we do have a time of solitude and silence it often makes us feel uncomfortable. We are quick to turn on the television, listen to music, stick AirPods in our ears and generally seek out some distraction. To simply be still and quiet doesn't seem to be in our nature. Like the shepherds in the field when the angel of the Lord appeared, too much silence can make us "sore afraid."

Mother Teresa was once asked what she said to God when she prayed. "I don't say anything. I just listen." She was then asked what God said to her. "He doesn't say anything, He just listens." Silence. But perhaps it is only in a period of solitary quietude that a star in the east may appear and, if you follow, it will lead you to the manger where the Christ Child lies. And you will find Him where He has always been, nestled peacefully in the deep core of your heart. Silence speaks volumes. Listen.

Prayer

Our Lord and our God, place your blessing on us as we move through this glorious season. May we as a church family come together to find both joy and peace as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child. Provide us with a silent night, a holy night when all is calm and quiet. And in that silence may we hear that small whispered voice that tells us: "Everything is okay; you are loved." Amen

6. "Away in a Manger"

By Doris & Roy Newman

> Luke 2:6–7, 12
>
> *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*
>
> *12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

> Mark 10:13–16
>
> *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

Reflection

"Away in a Manger" is most likely one of the top three carols sung by Christians around the world. Words portray a picture of love, joy and peace but the setting was quite different from our modern-day nurseries.

Come along as we quietly enter our nursery—notice the freshly painted walls and the sun streaming through the windows. It spotlights a tiny bundle of joy sleeping in a sturdy crib. A colorful onesie keeps the little one warm. The only animals present are a lop-eared bunny and a fuzzy brown bear. Looking about, we see a dresser/changing table containing all the items to meet the physical needs of the little one. Over by the window is an important piece of furniture—a rocking chair—a place to comfort a restless baby and to treasure a quiet moment holding your little one.

As you leave the room, you find comfort in knowing the GoodBaby baby monitor will alert you to any sounds or movement from the adjoining room.

Although the two "nurseries" are very different, they both bring Love, Joy and Peace.

May you and your family to experience all three this Christmas Season.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the humble manger and for every home where a little one is held and loved. Fill our homes this Christmas with Your love, joy, and peace. Amen.

Week of December 13.



7. "O Holy Night"

By Brad Hill

> Luke 2:8–14
>
> *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*
>
> Galatians 4:4–5
>
> *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*
>
> Titus 2:11
>
> *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.*

Reflection

Something is about to change. That's how I felt during the middle of my junior year of high school. After a string of unwise decisions that led to painful consequences, God placed a few people in my life who began telling me about Jesus. Something new—yet strangely familiar—began to stir within me, and I knew…

Something was about to change.

Change is often revealed through contrast. We see those contrasts throughout today's Scriptures and in the lyrics of this beautiful hymn. "O holy night, the stars are brightly shining." The stars pierce the darkness. Against Herod's imperial decree, God quietly announces the birth of a new King—the true King—to humble shepherds. Rome promises peace through military power; heaven proclaims peace through the Messiah. A baby born in obscurity is revealed to be Christ the Lord. A weary world rejoices. Chains are broken. The slave becomes a brother. Oppression shall cease.

Something is about to change.

The hymn continues, "Long lay the world, in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth." Those words describe my life during that season. I gradually came to believe that my soul was worth redeeming—not because of anything I had done, but simply because He appeared. Titus 2:11 echoes this truth: "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."

One evening, alone in my living room, I literally fell to my knees and confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord of my life. God's grace not only freed me from my past; it became my teacher. As God's grace flowed into my life, it began to flow through my life. He changed the way I saw others. "Truly He

taught us to love one another. His law is love and His Gospel is peace." Every conversation became an opportunity to share His grace and offer "a thrill of hope" so that a weary world could rejoice.

This Christmas, may you discover again that you are worth saving—not because of who you are, but because of who Christ is. May His grace lead you to fall on your knees before Christ the Lord. And may that same grace transform you into a thrill of hope for someone else. As we celebrate His coming, may we "evermore proclaim His power and glory."

Reflection Question

Thinking back over your life, what moments or seasons of change can you recall when God's transforming grace changed how you saw yourself and the world around you?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for redeeming us and reminding us that we are worth saving because of Your love revealed in Jesus Christ. May weary souls encounter the thrill of hope found in Him and rejoice. Teach us to live in humble surrender before Christ our Lord, and help us see others through Your eyes. As we celebrate the wonder of Christmas, fill us with Your grace so that Your love and peace may flow through us to a weary world. Amen.

8. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

By Ann Thompson

> Luke 2:13–14
>
> *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in*

the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Philippians 2:6–8

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Reflection

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing. Glory to the newborn King!"

I remember how we sang these words straight from our hearts in the kindergarten Christmas pageant, wearing beautiful angel costumes. I knew instantly that I loved this Christ Child and wanted to live my life for Jesus.

I remember Christmas gift shopping in downtown Pittsburgh, hearing this carol: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, glory to the newborn King!" I was excited to find the perfect gifts for my family because Jesus had become to me a special gift of love and inspiration!

I remember 300 students singing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, glory to the newborn King!" When they got to the part "Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth... God and sinners reconciled," I knew my students from Eden Christian Academy had also given their

hearts to Jesus Christ our Lord! Many of them are teaching kids today to sing: "Glory to the newborn King!"

I remember the carolers from Falling Spring Church singing in our home last Christmastime, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, glory to the newborn King!" It was a "glory-filled" moment as my husband Ken was beginning to lose his battle with Parkinson's disease. We were encouraged by those old familiar words: "Born that man no more may die!"

You see, as the angels gave the newborn king "glory," they were giving adoration and honor to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And we can also, as we give ourselves to God's Son, who came to earth to forgive and redeem us from our sinfulness, and welcome Him to live in our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit. It is daily giving God the glory for His goodness, grace, healing, and faithfulness! He alone is glorious and worthy of all praise and GLORY!

So this Advent Season, 2026, I pray to Father God for His Holy Spirit to prevail IN every activity, relationship, gift and song.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for coming into this world to teach us of the Father's glory—His purpose for salvation, discipleship, and service. Help us to forgive quickly, to welcome Your glory to shine through us so others can truly sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

9. "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

By Mike Unger

> Luke 2:15–20
>
> *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*
>
> *16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

Reflection

The shepherds' words in Luke 2:15 have always struck me because they sound so ordinary. "Let's go and see." There's no grand plan, no certainty about what they'll find. Just a willingness to leave what they know and follow the invitation. When I hear that alongside "O Come, All Ye Faithful," I notice the same gentle call: come. Not have everything figured out. Not be perfectly faithful. Just come and see.

If I'm honest, Advent often finds me distracted. Not because my schedule is overflowing, but because my attention is. My mind can get caught up in worries about the future, unfinished responsibilities, or the constant stream of everyday concerns. I sometimes move through the season assuming I already know the Christmas story, so I stop

expecting to see anything new. The shepherds challenge that in me. They heard good news, and instead of analyzing it or debating it, they went to see for themselves.

This year, I wonder if "going and seeing" means slowing down enough to notice where God is already at work. Maybe it looks like paying closer attention to a conversation I would normally rush through. Maybe it means sitting quietly with Scripture instead of immediately moving on to my to-do list. Maybe it's looking for signs of hope in places where I've assumed nothing is changing.

What encourages me is that the shepherds weren't religious experts. They were ordinary people who responded to an invitation. They arrived at the manger, saw what God was doing, and left changed, praising Him for what they had seen and heard. Their journey began with curiosity and trust, not certainty.

The hymn's repeated refrain, "O come, let us adore Him," feels different to me when I think about it this way. Adoration isn't just a Christmas song lyric. It begins with showing up. It begins with making room to see.

Reflection Questions

As Christmas approaches, I find myself wondering: Where am I being invited to "go and see"? What signs of God's presence have I overlooked because I was too busy, too tired, or too certain I already knew what He was doing? Maybe Advent is less about finding answers and more about accepting the invitation to draw near, to pay attention, and to discover that God is already there, waiting to be noticed.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for inviting us to come and see what You are doing. Sometimes we are distracted, uncertain, or simply not

paying attention. Open our eyes during this Advent season to notice Your presence in the ordinary moments of our days. Give us hearts that are willing to respond, like the shepherds did, with curiosity, trust, and wonder. Help us make room for You and draw us closer to the hope and joy found in Christ. Amen.

Week of December 20.



10. "We Three Kings"

By Kira Warner

> Matthew 2:1–12
>
> *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child*

> *with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Reflection

One of my earliest Christmas memories was making the three wise men using two-liter bottles, fabric, ribbon, and markers with my dad at a Falling Spring Advent event. Those three wise men have been a staple Christmas decoration in my parents' house ever since!

The story of the Magi reminds me that faith is often a journey rather than a destination. The Magi followed a star into the unknown without having all the details or guarantees of what they would find. Similarly, there have been seasons when I felt confident about where I was headed, but there have also been times when I couldn't even see the next step in front of me. Looking back, I can see that God was guiding me even when I wasn't sure where the path would lead.

In Matthew, the Magi came prepared to worship Jesus. They offered valuable gifts, recognizing His worth before fully understanding His future impact on the world. If I were to place a gift before Jesus today, it would be my trust. As simple as that may sound, it is often difficult to surrender my worries, need for control, and desire to have everything figured out. Trust can feel like a small gift compared to gold, frankincense, or myrrh, yet it is something God values deeply. I believe that offering Him my imperfect faith, questions, and efforts to follow Him is one of the most honest gifts I can give.

The difference between Herod's response to Jesus and the Magi's response is quite noteworthy. The same news that filled the Magi with joy filled Herod with fear. I think people respond differently to Jesus because He challenges what we value most. For the Magi, Jesus represented hope, truth, and a king worthy of worship. For Herod, Jesus threatened his power and control. Even today, some people welcome Jesus because they see Him as a source of grace and purpose, while others resist because following Him may require change, humility, or surrender. Our response often depends on what we are holding onto.

This passage encourages me to keep seeking God with the same determination the Magi displayed. They traveled great distances because they believed finding Jesus was worth the effort. Their example reminds me that even when the road ahead is uncertain, God is faithful to guide those who continue to seek Him.

Reflection Question

What "star" might God be using in your life right now to guide you closer to Him, and are you willing to follow it even if you don't know where it will lead?

Prayer

Lord, You guided the Magi with a star, and You guide us still. Give us the courage to follow, even when we cannot see the road ahead. Receive our trust as our gift to You. Amen.

11. “What Child Is This?”

By James Wright

> John 1:1–5, 14
>
> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*
>
> *14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
>
> Isaiah 53:2–5
>
> *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. 4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*
>
> Luke 2:16–18
>
> *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them*

> *about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*

Reflection

For twenty-five years, I have looked at my son in simply one way: as my son. He was the athletic, lovable, absent-minded professor. I saw him as a responsibility. He was my child, my youngest.

There were times, however, when I would look at him in amazement. His ability to think of others would simply blow my mind. Whether he was helping a fellow young classmate who struggled to understand instructions because of a language barrier, or using his own money to pay the entry fee for a friend so he could play on his athletic team, his compassion was always evident. Eventually, I stopped being surprised by his caring nature.

However, on April 6 of this year, Jodi and I were informed by our son that he was going to be a father. Now, that changes things.

For most of my life, or at least my adult life, I have looked at Christ as my Lord. He was the one who watched over me, knew my thoughts, knew my dreams, knew my every need, and was always there. In many ways, I viewed Him more as a father than a friend.

It is also how I believed I was raising both of my children. Being their friend was never as important to me as simply being there for them.

Seeing my son preparing to experience what I have experienced has also changed the way I see Christ. To put it simply, I feel that I am no longer just following Him. Now, I am able to walk beside Him. His counsel is my comfort. "The King of Kings salvation brings."

I believe the writer means to humble us by pointing to this child's sacrificial future. The thought that this child, who is no more than a few days old, will one day willingly give up His life so that all may have life is almost impossible to comprehend. As a follower, I am grateful. As a father, I am terrified.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for coming to us as a child, and for giving Your life so that we might have life. Teach us to walk beside You, and be our comfort in every season of life. Amen.

12. "Joy to the World"

By Annabel Hill

> Psalm 98
>
> *Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. 2 The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. 3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. 4 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; 5 make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, 6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the Lord, the King. 7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. 8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; 9 let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.*

> Luke 2:10–11
>
> *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

Reflection

One way that I have personally seen the world joyfully praise its Creator, is when people sing songs of praise about our good and faithful God. I think this is one of the wonderful ways that we can show joy for our Lord.

Now according to Google AI, joy is actually different than happiness. Yes, they both cause a state of pleasure and well-being, but the difference is joy is long-lasting, while happiness is simply temporary. That is why I see so much joy in people singing God's praises. What God did for us gives us a feeling of joy that will last forever, not just for a moment.

In the song "Joy to the World" it says, "He rules the world with truth and grace." The fact that God will give us grace willingly whenever we need it, just because He loves us, is something I get a lot of joy from. Also, the fact that a God who is willing to do that rules the world, brings me so much hope and joy. Another thing we can all find joy in is the Christmas story. For it is the time when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came to this earth to save all of us. The Christmas season is a wonderful reminder of just how generous and deserving of praise God truly is.

Reflection Questions

As we move into 2027, how can we carry the joy the Christmas season brings us throughout the New Year? How can we show praise to God not just through our words but through our actions?

Advent and Christmas

at Falling Spring

Nov. 29:	First Sunday of Advent, communion at all services.
Dec. 2:	Youth Advent Generosity Conspiracy, 6:30-8:00
Dec. 13:	Christmas pageant — one service at 10 AM in the Sanctuary.
Dec. 13:	Caroling and cocoa, 2-4 PM. Meet in the FLC.
Dec. 24:	Christmas Eve services: 4:30 in the FLC; 7:00 in the Sanctuary.

