

VOLUME II



CAROLS

THE STORIES
BEHIND THE MUSIC



A NEW CHRISTMAS STUDY
FROM JERSEY CHURCH

Published: November 2025

Bible study content and devotional material for this booklet are provided by Jersey Church in partnership with Lifeway Custom Church Resources.

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Cover art by Epiic / Bobby Shaw

Carols

November 30 - December 21

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DEVOTIONALS

**COME THOU LONG
EXPECTED JESUS**

DAY 1

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness. You have enlarged the nation and increased its joy. The people have rejoiced before you as they rejoice at harvest time and as they rejoice when dividing spoils. For you have shattered their oppressive yoke and the rod on their shoulders, the staff of their oppressor, just as you did on the day of Midian. For every trampling boot of battle and the bloodied garments of war will be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

No matter how hard they try, human leaders will always let us down in some way. Isaiah reminds us that real hope is not going to be found in a person or party. It will only be found in our eternal King Jesus whose reign will never end.

For Israel, the description of a great light to come spoke to their need in the middle of political turmoil, fear, and uncertainty. Isaiah reminded them that they were not forgotten. The names given to this coming king go beyond human potential. He was Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

As Advent begins, we are a people in the dark, like Israel, waiting for Christ to return to finish His work. Our world feels much like Isaiah's day - chaotic, uncertain, fractured, and dark. The good news is the same promise stands. God has sent His light into this world and Advent invites us to shift our focus from despairing at the darkness to eagerly watching for the dawn. We live with anticipation that Christ's kingdom will come in its fullness. Let us be people of the day as we wait for His return.

- **Where do you see darkness in your life or the world right now?**
- **Thank the Lord that in the darkness He sent the Light of the world. Ask Him to teach you how to walk in the light and trust His promises, even when you can't see clearly.**

DAY 2

Isaiah 7:14

Scripture Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

The name Immanuel means “God with us.” Instead of being a God far off watching in the distance, the Lord was going to come near. God stepped right into the world fulfilling the prophecy as we see in Matthew’s Gospel some hundreds of years later (Matthew 1:23). God did take on flesh and enter the world as a baby. God could have sent Jesus to earth in any way He chose, but He sent the Creator of the universe to earth as a humble infant. He experienced hunger, exhaustion, pain, and fatigue. He understands us fully because He became one of us. Advent isn’t only a celebration of a past event. It is also recognizing God’s presence with us now and His promise to return finally.

When you go through hard times, one of the greatest comforts is simply knowing someone is with you. The message of Advent is you can live with confidence that Jesus is still with us through His Holy Spirit in every moment and circumstance.

- **Where do you most need to remember God is with you? What difference does it make when you do?**
- **Thank Jesus for always being with you. Ask Him for wisdom to lean on His presence, trust in His guidance, and walk in confidence that He will never leave you.**

DAY 3

Jeremiah 23:5-6

“Look, the days are coming” - this is the LORD’s declaration - “when I will raise up a Righteous Branch for David. He will reign wisely as king and administer justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. This is the name he will be called: The LORD Is Our Righteousness.”

If you ever cut down a tree but leave the stump, what appears dead may show a new shoot growing up from the side as evidence that life is not gone completely. This is the image Jeremiah gave. Even when everything looked cut off and hopeless, God would bring new life. With God, hope can spring up where it seems impossible.

The days of Jeremiah were dark and difficult for God’s people. Israel faced judgment and exile, but even in His warnings to them, God gave hope of a different future. He promised that a righteous branch from David’s line would reign wisely. This Branch would bring justice and righteousness that the previous kings of Israel had failed to provide.

In a world where injustice often dominates the headlines, Jeremiah’s promise points us to the One who will set all things right. Advent sets our minds on the hope found in Jesus. Until then, we seek to display His righteousness through our words and actions. Jesus is our Branch of hope and those who believe are rooted in Him.

- **What would it look like for you to reflect Jesus’s righteousness in your daily life?**
- **Thank the Lord for sending Jesus to this world. Confess the ways you have not trusted Him or displayed His righteousness. Commit to rooting your life in His promises that you might bear fruit.**

DAY 4

Lamentations 3:21-26

Yet I call this to mind, and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! I say, "The LORD is my portion; therefore, I will put my hope in him. "The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the person who seeks him. It is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD."

Anyone who travels over a busy holiday season is familiar with waiting in long lines. Few are excited about standing to wait their turn for security screenings and baggage checks. But consider the joyful reunions that take place later when families and loved ones are reunited. Hugging, laughing, and celebrating make all the long, slow-moving lines worth it. The waiting might be hard, but the reward makes the difference.

Jerusalem had fallen and everything felt dark and hopeless. Jeremiah continued to point people to remember God's steadfast love and unfailing mercy. He stressed that God's love gave them the assurance that even with everything in ruins, hope remained, and the result would be worth it.

Advent teaches us the same today. Even when life feels dark and hard, God's mercies are new every morning. His faithfulness never ends. These are facts we can cling to when the struggle is real, and the waiting is hard. Instead of warring with our waiting, Advent challenges us to embrace expectation as we trust in God's timing and promises.

- **How can remembering God's past faithfulness strengthen you in areas where you are currently waiting?**
- **Praise the Lord for His faithfulness over the years. Make a list and keep it close during Advent as you focus on His great love and faithfulness.**

DAY 5

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing for joy, Daughter Zion; shout loudly, Israel! Be glad and celebrate with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has removed your punishment; he has turned back your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is among you; you need no longer fear harm. On that day it will be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not fear; Zion, do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is among you, a warrior who saves. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will be quiet in his love. He will delight in you with singing.”

The picture of God rejoicing over His children with singing is the end goal of Advent. We will experience joy in God's presence, peace restored, and salvation complete. Understand that salvation isn't just about what God saves us from like sin, judgment, and death, but it is also our restoration to a relationship of joy with Him.

The same God who is mighty to save is the same God who delights in His people. God delights in and sings over all who belong to Him. The more you grasp the magnitude of being in relationship with that kind of God, the more you realize your best response is to sing back to Him. The truth of Advent is worthy of the best celebration!

- **What does it mean to live with joy in the present while looking forward to Christ's return?**
- **Thank the Lord for His saving love and delight. Ask Him to help you reflect the joy of your salvation to the lost world around you.**

COME THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

HAGGAI 2:7; MATTHEW 1:21

NOVEMBER 30, 2025

MAIN POINT

The coming of Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture and met humanity's need for a Savior.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Waiting is part of life. There are things we wait for with dread, like tax day or paying a certain bill, but consider something you wait for with great anticipation—such as graduation, a wedding, the birth of a child, or Christmas morning. These things all tend to make waiting feel long as we eagerly look forward to them. But when the day arrives, it makes the waiting all worth it. That sense of longing captures what Advent is all about. For centuries, God's people longed for the Messiah, who would bring peace, hope, and salvation. Haggai spoke of a time when the “desire of all nations” would come. Centuries later, Matthew announced that the Savior would be named Jesus. Advent reminds us our waiting isn't wasted. It shapes our hearts in gratitude for the first arrival of Jesus and helps remind us to long for His second coming.

- **What is something you've waited for that seemed to take forever?**
- **How did the arrival of that thing or event make the waiting worthwhile?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Haggai 2:7 and Matthew 1:21

In the days of Haggai, the temple in Jerusalem seemed unimpressive compared to Solomon's temple. God gave a promise that one day the nations would be shaken, and the desire of all nations would come, filling the temple with glory. This was way more than a prediction about a building; it was a reference to Jesus Himself. Note that Haggai's prophecy addressed more than just the Jewish nation. All people long for peace, security, and purpose. The true desire of people's hearts is ultimately found in Jesus.

- **How do you see people searching for purpose, peace, and security?**
- **Where outside of Jesus are you prone to look for those things?**

Five hundred years passed between Haggai's prophecy and the birth of Jesus. God's people had to wait, and an extended period of this waiting was in silence. Advent reminds us that our waiting for God's promises is not in vain. It's in the waiting that He prepares us to receive.

- **When you think about waiting as preparation to receive God's promises, how does it change the way you wait?**

- **How can you seek this posture no matter your circumstances?**

Joseph was told to give the child Mary was carrying the name Jesus, which means “the Lord saves.” Every person needs forgiveness and reconciliation with God that can only be found in Jesus the Savior. We often think our greatest need is health, money, power, or success, when sin is the real problem and our greatest need is to be restored to God. Jesus came not only to improve our lives but to transform our lives through His sacrificial death on the cross.

- **How has your life been transformed by a relationship with Jesus?**

- **Where do you still feel the need for transformation?**

Jesus is the fulfillment of centuries worth of longing as the hymn “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” captures powerfully. During Advent we don’t only look back at Jesus’s first arrival, we also look forward to His return. The same Jesus who came to save the world will come again and make all things new. Just as Israel waited eagerly for His arrival, so should we look forward with eager anticipation for Him to return. In the meantime, just as the temple was filled with the glory of God, so we live our lives filled with the Holy Spirit. The world we live in is noisy, antagonistic, and distracting. Just as the King of kings came quietly into a manger, we are to be intentional about creating time and space to welcome Him into our waiting, longing, and everyday lives.

- **How does the promise of Christ's return give you courage in the struggles you are currently facing?**

APPLICATION

Offer the following action steps for the application of God's Word.

- **What false hope are you most tempted to run to instead of Jesus?**
- **How can you intentionally make space for Christ in the midst of holiday busyness?**
- **Who in your life needs hope and how can you point them to Jesus this Advent season?**

PRAY

Praise the Lord for the gift of Jesus and how He has changed your life. Ask God for opportunities to share the good news of the gospel with those around you this Advent season.

HAGGAI 2:7

The treasures of all the nations will come is not a messianic hope, but a promise that God will provide all the gold and silver that is needed (v. 8 says they “belong to me”) to make the unimpressive temple glorious. Ezra 6:8 marks the fulfillment of this prophecy, for the Persians paid the full cost of reconstruction.

MATTHEW 1:21

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means “Yahweh saves.” The angel explained that Jesus’s name revealed his purpose: He would rescue sinners from the punishment they deserve. This salvation would be experienced by his people, identified as those who follow Jesus.

DEVOTIONALS

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

DAY 1

1 Samuel 16:6–13

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and said, “Certainly the LORD’s anointed one is here before him.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart.” Jesse called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel. “The LORD hasn’t chosen this one either,” Samuel said. Then Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, “The LORD hasn’t chosen this one either.” After Jesse presented seven of his sons to him, Samuel told Jesse, “The LORD hasn’t chosen any of these.” Samuel asked him, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” he answered, “but right now he’s tending the sheep.” Samuel told Jesse, “Send for him. We won’t sit down to eat until he gets here.” So, Jesse sent for him. He had beautiful eyes and a healthy, handsome appearance. Then the LORD said, “Anoint him, for he is the one.” So, Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully on David from that day forward. Then Samuel set out and went to Ramah.

We live in a culture that values appearances. Those who have the ideal size, fame, and visibility are exalted, at times regardless of their character. That attitude is flipped in Scripture and today’s verses give one of the most famous illustrations of God’s values compared to the world’s.

Samuel was tasked with anointing the king who would replace Saul at the right time. The Lord sent Samuel to Jesse’s house where each son was brought out one after another. Jesse’s older sons looked impressive. They had stature and good looks. These men seemed strong, capable, and even kingly by human standards. But God reminded Samuel that His perspective is not the same as ours. God is more concerned with the heart of a person than their outward appearance.

As the youngest son, David wasn't even included or considered worthy of being introduced to Samuel. He was out in the field watching over the sheep. Yet God chose him. Centuries later, a small town was chosen to be the birthplace of the Messiah and like David, it was an unlikely option. God is still working in unexpected ways today, the question is if we are paying attention.

- **Where do you feel small or unworthy? How could you offer that to God for Him to use as a display of His glory?**
- **Thank the Lord for caring more about your heart than your appearance. Confess the times you have been more focused on your outward self than your spiritual self.**

DAY 2

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

In Isaiah's day, Judah faced enemies on every side. King Ahaz was tempted to make alliances with other nations to secure peace. But instead of trusting in human strength, God offered a sign of His faithfulness. God promised that a virgin would bear a son who would be called Immanuel. God promised to come near to save His people.

This promise was the hope the people held onto for centuries, even when it seemed impossible. Generations passed and some likely began to doubt it would ever occur. But in due time, the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled. God's promises may take longer than we expect but they are always reliable. He never forgets or fails to follow through. His timing is different than ours, but His faithfulness is certain.

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. While waiting isn't easy, God uses it to refine us and develop our faith. Just as Israel learned to trust God's Word, we are called to cling to His promises in times of uncertainty. Jesus's birth wasn't just a sign of God's promise; it was the very presence of God stepping down to earth. He didn't send help—He came Himself. That's the God we serve. He doesn't leave us to face life alone but walks with us every step of the way.

- **Where do you have trouble believing God is with you? How does remembering He is Immanuel give you assurance every day?**
- **Praise the Lord for sending Jesus as Immanuel. Confess the ways you've doubted Him. Ask Him to help you trust that He is with you and will be with you no matter what.**

DAY 3

John 6:32–35

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, Moses didn’t give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said, “Sir, give us this bread always.” “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.”

Today’s verses took place just after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. Jesus referenced the manna in the wilderness that met temporary needs, but it couldn’t give eternal life. He then declared He was the true bread from heaven. Bread has long represented that which sustains life. Just as the body can’t survive without food, our souls can’t thrive without Jesus. He alone truly satisfies.

The world attempts to convince us that there are other things that give satisfaction. Think about how strongly our culture promotes material, financial, and physical success. But all of those things will fail you in the long run. When you place your hope and trust in something other than Jesus, you will inevitably end up disappointed and struggling to understand why you aren’t fulfilled. Your soul was created for relationship with Jesus and He alone can provide everything you need. He is enough.

- **What substitutes do you turn to for satisfaction and how might you seek that in Jesus?**
- **Thank Jesus for being the Bread of Life and satisfying your soul. Confess the other things you have chased after and commit to seeking satisfaction in Him alone moving forward.**

DAY 4

John 1:1–5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

Have you ever been outside at night where there's not much ambient light? Maybe you were hiking or camping outside the city. Without other sources of light, the dark gets deep, faster. What was familiar moments ago now seems a bit ominous and even dangerous. However, if you have a flashlight or strike a match, even the smallest light pierces the darkness and changes everything.

Darkness also describes the fear, sin, confusion, and brokenness around us. We see it in the world and in our hearts. On our own, we can't overcome it. But as we see in John's Gospel, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. No matter how deep or dark the shadows, they can't extinguish the light of Christ.

Light has power. It shows us the next step to take and exposes what is hidden. Light brings the warmth and life we need. That's what Christ does for those who follow Him. Advent encourages us to look to the light instead of focusing on the darkness. In Jesus, we are reminded that despair can be overcome, and sin doesn't get the final say. When we walk in His light, not only do we experience hope, we also reflect that light toward others in need of hope too.

- **Where do you feel surrounded by darkness and how can you look to Christ's light for hope and direction?**
- **Thank Jesus for being the Light of the world and defeating darkness for you. Praise Him for the ways He shows you the steps to take, guides you, and gives you hope. Ask for opportunities to reflect His light to others who are stumbling in darkness.**

DAY 5

Isaiah 9:6–7

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

Many announcements in life are met with excitement. Hearing about an upcoming concert, sporting event, graduation, or new baby might spark joy and excitement. Isaiah announced the coming of a child who would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Beyond any earthly announcement, this child was going to establish a kingdom of righteousness and justice that would never end.

For Israel, surrounded by war and oppression, this was the best news possible. God was promising peace that would outlast every earthly conflict. The world tries to achieve peace through politics, wealth, or personal control but none of these last. Real peace is found only in Christ, as He reconciles us to God and restores our brokenness. The biblical concept of peace is more than an absence of conflict. It is wholeness, restoration, harmony, and life the way that God intended.

On the cross, Jesus dealt with the root cause of our brokenness by defeating sin and death once and for all. By removing our guilt and reconciling us to our perfect and holy God, He made lasting peace possible. The peace of Advent affects both the present and future. Right now, we can rest in God's love and forgiveness. And one day, Jesus will return to establish a world where peace covers the world forever. That is what we have to look forward to.

- **What areas of your life feel restless or unsettled? How can you surrender those to the Prince of Peace?**
- **Thank Jesus for reconciling you to God through His work on the cross. Confess the ways you have tried to have control. Ask Him to teach you to surrender and rest in His peace.**

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

MICAH 5:2; LUKE 2:4-7; JOHN 8:12

DECEMBER 7, 2025

MAIN POINT

God chose Bethlehem as the unlikely birthplace of His Son, the promised Messiah and the Light of the world.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Think about some of the most famous cities in the world. Notable cities tend to be larger and have something that really makes them stand out, like tall skyscrapers, famous museums, or unique architecture. Interestingly, God chose a small, unassuming town as the birthplace of His Son. Bethlehem was relatively unknown and yet it was there in the countryside that the long-awaited Messiah took His first breath as a human. The Christmas carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” captures the irony that God’s greatest gift came in a place many overlooked. Studying Bethlehem reminds us that God often works in surprising ways and through unlikely people or places to fulfill His promises and bring hope to the world.

- **What do you know about Bethlehem?**
- **How was Jesus’s chosen birthplace an early sign of how His coming kingdom would operate?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Micah 5:2.

Centuries before Jesus was born, Micah prophesied that the ruler of Israel would come out of Bethlehem. Bethlehem was a small town that wasn't politically powerful or economically wealthy. God delights in using the humble and overlooked for His purposes. Comparing Micah 5 with the record of Jesus actual birth reinforces that God's plans are sure and nothing will keep Him from His promises. Like Bethlehem, even if we feel unlikely or overlooked, God values faithfulness over fame and He often uses the overlooked to further His kingdom.

- **What are some other instances you know of where God worked through unexpected people and places?**
- **How does this remind us that the kingdom of God is often upside down compared to the world's view?**

> Ask a volunteer to read Luke 2:4-7.

The account of the birth of Christ in Luke 2 may be familiar, but there is much to be learned about who God is. Luke wrote his gospel using very simple and plain language. It is easy to overlook how incredible the situation was and how miraculously the Lord orchestrated His Son's arrival on earth. The Prince of Peace came to earth as a newborn baby in the town of Bethlehem, and the world was never the same again.

- **What typically comes to mind when you think about the nativity story and Jesus's birth?**
- **What are some ways it's easy for us to miss the magnificent truth of these events?**

As part of God's plan, Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem in accordance with the political authority of the day. Despite the miraculous events taking place, Jesus's birth was largely overlooked by those in the area. Think about how similar this is to the world today. God is at work all around us and yet so many are caught up in their schedules and activities that they have no idea of the Lord's activity. Although in desperate need of hope, peace, and light, we can be so busy that we miss out on what Jesus came to bring to the world. It is important that we take time in the rush of the holidays to make sure this is not the case. If it is, we miss the whole point.

- **What are some reasons we might miss out on the work of God in our midst?**
- **When was a time this happened in your life?**
- **Read John 8:12. Jesus called Himself the Light of the world. If Jesus is the light by which we rightly see everything else, how should that impact the way we prioritize our lives around Him?**

- **How should it change the way we seek to share with others?**

Our lives become beacons of hope when we surrender to the King who humbly arrived into the world from Bethlehem. He is the Light we need to shine in the world filled with darkness and confusion. This is captured well in the carol we are considering today, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

APPLICATION

Offer the following action steps for the application of God’s Word.

- **In what ordinary or overlooked part of your life might Jesus want to shine His light?**
- **What does Bethlehem’s role in God’s plan teach you about how God views humility and weakness compared to the world?**
- **Since God delights to use small, ordinary places like Bethlehem, how does that challenge the way you view your own value and purpose? How does it encourage you?**

PRAY

Thank the Lord for His plan and the way that He worked all the details of Jesus’s birth out perfectly. Ask for opportunities during this season to shine His light into the dark world around you. Seek to remember that He can use you, no matter what.

MICAH 5:2

5:2–5a God would raise up another ruler from David’s hometown of Bethlehem Ephrathah (Ru 4:11) who would be his servant (for me; cp. 1Sm 16:1). This “ruler” will extend God’s kingdom to the ends of the earth (see Ps 2:8; 72:8) and bring God’s “wholeness” or peace (Hb shalom) with his righteous reign (Is 9:6). His people will live securely in his kingdom. His origin (lit “goings out”) will be from antiquity (miqedem), and from ancient times (miymey olam, lit “from days long ago”). Both terms can refer just to a very long time ago, perhaps the beginnings of messianic prophecy (Gn 3:15; 12:3; 49:10, etc.), or to eternity (Ps 74:12; Pr 8:23; Hab 1:12, etc.). God had not forgotten his promise of granting an eternal kingship to David (2Sm 7:4–17). This coming Davidic ruler would appear when she who is in labor has given birth. Varying interpretations of this woman include: (1) the mother of Messiah (i.e., Mary); (2) Bethlehem, the birthplace of Messiah; (3) a righteous remnant bringing forth salvation; and (4) a historical reference to the upcoming exile (4:10). The exiles would go forth as from the womb into captivity and return once more (v. 3). See Matthew’s application of these verses (and 2Sm 5:2) to Jesus in Mt 2:6.

LUKE 2:4-7

2:3–4 His own town refers not to where Joseph presently lived (Nazareth in Galilee) but to the town of his ancestral roots (Bethlehem in Judea), which was called the city of David because King David grew up there (1Sm 16:1). Joseph was descended from David (LK 1:27). The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem would have taken three days and covered roughly ninety miles.

2:5–6 As months before in 1:27, Mary at this time was still only engaged to Joseph because they had not yet consummated their marriage via intercourse. Nevertheless, she was pregnant (see note at 1:31–33) and ready to give birth.

2:7 The words her firstborn Son naturally implies that Mary later had other children (Mt 13:55–56). That baby Jesus was laid ... in a manger indicates that the family was forced to stay in a stable, or perhaps a cave that served as a stable, because there was no other room available in Bethlehem.

DEVOTIONALS

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

DAY 1

John 1:1-5,14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Christmas story didn't begin in Bethlehem. Jesus has always existed with the Father. He is not a secondary character in the story of humanity. He is the Author Himself who chose to descend from heaven in His divinity, wrapped in skin and humility to dwell with us. This fact pushes back at the idea that God is a faraway deity that watches from a distance. The incarnation means God understands what it feels like to be human, and He empathizes with our struggles.

When a large company like Apple or Amazon wants to reach a certain community, they will often send representatives to live in that area. The goal is to learn the culture, know the people, and connect with their target audience on a different level. While this is a weak comparison, it does help to imagine how God moved into the neighborhood by coming down to earth in human flesh to dwell with His people. He isn't an aloof God that studies His people from a boardroom and draws conclusions about them. He is a personal God who loves us so much He became one of us so He could redeem us.

His nearness changes everything. We never have to wonder if He sees us or cares about what we are going through. When life feels hard, remember that God loves you enough that He came near.

- **Where do you most need to remember that God is near?**
- **Thank Jesus for coming to earth in human form and being near to you in every moment. Ask Him to help you see how He is with you and who you can share Him with.**

DAY 2

Isaiah 9:6-7

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.

Have you ever been on an airplane experiencing extreme turbulence? The pilot will often announce safety precautions and reassure passengers of the crew's experience and preparedness. Hearing from the person in control of the plane can calm the jitters and fears that tend to arise when the plane is shaking. It is comforting to know that even though your situation is scary or troubling, it is not uncommon and has been weathered before. While there is nothing that you can do personally, you can rest easy that the people in charge have been trained for that very situation.

Isaiah prophesied about the peace of Christ to Israel who longed for stability after being plagued by wars. We often define peace as the absence of conflict, but Scripture describes peace as wholeness, harmony, and right relationship with God and others. The peace that Jesus brings doesn't erase trouble, it restores trust. Even when the world shakes and trembles, we can be comforted that His kingdom is never shaken.

During the busyness of the holidays, our lives can feel like an airplane in turbulence - rattled by stress, expectations, headlines, disappointment, or relationship issues. We are invited to anchor ourselves in the promise that "of His peace there will be no end." His rule will bring calm regardless of our situation and even when our own efforts fail.

- **What would it look like for you to trust Christ in times of stress instead of trying to work things out on your own?**
- **Thank Jesus for being your peace in every circumstance. Confess the ways you have tried to control things by your own efforts and commit to trusting Him going forward.**

DAY 3

Scripture Reference Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy. His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors.

During the Blitz of World War II, when London was being bombed night after night, people would gather in underground shelters for safety. What's remarkable is that even in those moments of fear and uncertainty, many Londoners chose joy. They sang songs, shared tea, told jokes, and even organized small dances while bombs thundered overhead.

They weren't ignoring the danger - they were defying despair. In the face of darkness, they chose joy. The power of joy doesn't erase hardship, but it transforms how we walk through it.

When young Mary was told she was pregnant with the child of God, her faith erupted in a song that we call the Magnificat. Her circumstances were seemingly impossible, unusual, and uncertain. But her joy was anchored in the character of God, and she responded accordingly. Without waiting to see how things would unfold, Mary praised God. We may be tempted to "hedge our bets" by waiting to see the outcome before praising God but Mary shows that we can, and should, praise God in every moment.

Joy that lasts flows from surrender, not striving. It comes from a relationship with the God of the universe, who chose to come near to His people and that makes all the difference.

- **How can you cultivate joy that is rooted in God's character and not your circumstances?**
- **Ask God to teach you how to rejoice in Him in every circumstance. Give thanks that you can trust Him and experience joy that overrides fear.**

DAY 4

Luke 1:76-79

And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God's merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Imagine a raging storm that takes out the power in your home. You are forced to seek out information about possible tornadoes and deal with the safety of your family all while maneuvering through darkness. The moment when the power comes back on and light floods your home again creates an overwhelming feeling of relief. The storm is less scary when you are sitting in the light. That is a glimpse of what Christ does in the human heart. His presence brings light and life where fear once ruled.

Zechariah's prophecy over his son, John the Baptist, painted a picture of sunrise that the world was waiting to experience. When Jesus came, dawn broke over a world long held in darkness. His light penetrated to the deepest places, and His light still reaches anyone who looks to Him.

But darkness isn't just external, it can be internal and spiritual. When confusion, guilt, shame, and despair settle over a heart far from God, darkness overwhelms. Jesus came to both illuminate the path to God and heal what the dark damages. Every time grace forgives, mercy restores, love includes, or truth clarifies, His light shines. If you have been walking through a dark valley, take heart. Light has a way of breaking through and as you look up to Jesus, that light can flood your life and chase away the darkness.

- **Where do you need the light of Christ to shine in your life today?**
- **Thank the Lord for sending Jesus into the world and changing your life. Ask for opportunities to share that light with someone around you who is overwhelmed by darkness.**

DAY 5

Philippians 2:5-11

Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul wrote an overview of the gospel in challenge to fellow believers and how they should live. Jesus humbled Himself, took on the form of a servant, obeyed to the point of death, and was exalted to the highest place. The cradle and the cross are inseparable. We rejoice in who Jesus is and all He has done. Worship is heaven's language and our calling.

Think about what it means that Jesus humbled Himself and for us to adopt the same attitude. This goes totally against the culture we live in and yet that is exactly what we are called to do. The key is we don't humble ourselves in our own strength, but as a result of surrendering to the Lord and seeking to live as His Word instructs in everything. Many are willing to surrender until it becomes uncomfortable, but Jesus stayed surrendered to the Father all the way to the cross.

Consider what it would look like for you to be surrendered to God as Jesus was. What needs to change? How would your decision making be different? How might you better reflect the light of the Lord to the world around you?

- **What is one thing you can do differently to seek surrender to the Lord?**
- **Ask God to empower you to live with humility like Jesus, even when it gets uncomfortable. Seek to reflect the light of Christ to those around you this Christmas season.**

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

LUKE 2:8-14

DECEMBER 14, 2025

MAIN POINT

Jesus's birth brought light to the dark world and should inspire worship in us today.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Christmas carols can take us back to certain places, times, and feelings. “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” has been a part of Christmas celebrations for almost three centuries. Written by Charles Wesley, this carol is a bold declaration of the gospel. It is intended to specify the truth behind the Christmas season and our celebrations. “Hark” is a call to pay attention to heaven’s announcement of the good news that the Messiah had arrived. We can link Wesley’s song to Luke 2 and appreciate the fresh wonder it instills in us. As we think about how the angels rejoiced, we are invited to join in and lift our own voices in celebration that the Son of God came to bring peace between heaven and earth.

- **What are some Christmas carols that bring up memories of past Christmases for you?**
- **Why is the message of peace between heaven and earth such cause for celebration?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Luke 2:8-14.

Luke's account of the birth of Christ paints a picture of the pastoral scene that night. Shepherds were watching over their flocks. These workers were typically not the most powerful or respected in the area. They tended to be simple men living on the edges of society. Yet, God chose them to be the first witnesses of the Savior's birth. The Lord often chooses the overlooked of the world to take part in the miraculous.

- **What does the angels' audience indicate about who the gospel message is for?**
- **How does this translate to our time today?**

Part of the beauty of grace is that it finds us in ordinary places, and it is offered to every person regardless of status, race, or culture. God stepped down from heaven in human form, through Jesus, to bring light into the darkness for all people. Luke made it clear that the angel's announcement was not just for the shepherds, although they heard it first. It is good news for all the world. The gospel offers joy and salvation for all who choose to receive it.

- **Where do you need to be reminded that the gospel message is for all people?**
- **Who around you might feel like they are excluded from the hope Jesus brings? How might you speak hope to them?**

This week's carol specifies that the eternal God clothed Himself in humanity, describing the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and His reconciling work. It is deep theology wrapped in a familiar melody that inspires us to rejoice as we envision the dark night on a quiet hillside when angels appeared and made their glorious announcement. Imagine the awe of the shepherds as they witnessed a choir of angels proclaiming glory and peace. That moment revealed God's heart for humanity and His plan to draw near and make a way to be reconciled to Him forever. We are not called to be spectators of Christmas but to be participants of heaven's song.

- **How can the lyrics of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" deepen your worship this Christmas? Take time reading through the words of the song and consider what connection you see in today's passage.**

After seeing the child, the shepherds couldn't keep the good news to themselves. Joy in Christ is not meant to be contained. It is meant to be shared and should overflow to those around us. When we truly grasp who Jesus is, our response should be like the shepherds—worship that leads to witness. The message of Christmas is meant to be shared with the

world. This Christmas season when you hear this carol, don't just sing the words, believe them and be reminded that heaven's joy is still breaking into human hearts today and changing lives for eternity.

- **Where do you need to experience God's peace this Christmas? How can you seek Him for this?**

APPLICATION

Offer the following action steps for the application of God's Word.

- **Which lyric from "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" stands out to you most and why?**
- **How can you "join the triumph of the skies" and share the message of hope with someone else? Why are we all called to do this?**
- **How might you share the good news of Jesus through this song this season?**

PRAY

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus to bring peace between God and man. Ask Him to give you clear eyes to see the message of Christmas with an open heart and fresh wonder. Seek to find ways to promote peace with others who need to hear the message that Jesus brings.

LUKE 2:8-14

2:8 The sheep used for temple sacrifices in Jerusalem were kept in fields outside Bethlehem. The work of shepherds was more important at night because of the threats from thieves and predators. Though the social position of shepherds was lowly, the role is often viewed positively in the Bible. God is pictured as a shepherd (Gn 49:24; Ps 23:1). King David was the shepherd of God's people (2Sm 5:2). Jesus called himself "the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11).

2:9–10 The glory of the Lord was a bright light (in the midst of the darkness of night), indicating God's glorious presence. It is only natural to be terrified at the sight of an angel (see 1:11–12), not to mention a sudden, overwhelming light from the sky. The angel spoke to calm the shepherds and refocus their attention on the proclamation of the gospel (good news). All the people could refer to Israel, but given Luke's emphasis on the gospel spreading to the Gentiles, it probably means "all nations."

2:11–12 Savior means "deliverer, redeemer." Messiah (Gk *christos*, equivalent to the Hb *meshiach*) means "anointed one," especially focusing on being anointed as king. Lord (Gk *kurios*) was used of secular rulers, but it is also the standard translation of the primary name of God in Hebrew, Yahweh. The shepherds would have been shocked to hear that a divine messianic ruler had been born, but to be told he was lying in a manger and born to a man and woman of humble means would have seemed preposterous.

2:13–14 The praise of the heavenly host is well-known today as the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo,” from the first words of v. 14 in the Latin Vulgate (Glory to God in the highest). To give “glory to God” does not give him something he otherwise lacks. Rather, it is a confession of the wondrous glory he forever possesses. The peace to be found on earth was not the Pax Romana (the “universal peace” of the Roman Empire) but peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rm 5:1; see Lk 1:78–79). The people whom God favors are those who have found God’s undeserved favor, or grace, through Christ.

DEVOTIONALS

O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL

DAY 1

Luke 2:8-16

In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.” Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors! When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger.

Several years ago, during the Christmas season, a group of hikers came across an injured dog on a frozen trail. Instead of passing by, they stopped and chose to do something. They wrapped the dog in a blanket and carried it miles to safety. People heard about what they had done and called the rescue of the animal a Christmas miracle. The hikers weren’t planning to carry a dog out of the hike. They weren’t heroes. They were available for the interruption in plans and willing to do what was necessary at the time.

These shepherds were faced with a similar moment. They were ordinary people doing ordinary things, who were interrupted by the plans of the Lord. Angels broke the silence of the night sky and invited them to witness the miraculous event of the Savior born to them. The shepherds didn’t wait for confirmation or a news headline, they believed the angels and went immediately to Bethlehem in response to the announcement. The faithful are those who are willing to obey and respond. When we come to Christ, we don’t need perfection or position. We just need open hearts like the shepherds who were obedient and left rejoicing with overflowing hearts. God still invites us to come as we are. When we respond to Him, we will leave changed.

- **What step of obedience is God calling you to take in response to His invitation?**
- **Thank the Lord for calling ordinary people like you to be part of the miraculous. Ask Him to make you sensitive to the opportunities to respond in obedience as He invites you.**

DAY 2

Matthew 1:22-23

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated "God is with us."

Delivery drivers are extra busy during the holiday season, but they may still experience loneliness if they drop off packages but never interact with others. Some customers make an effort to connect with and show appreciation for the men and women who bring their packages. One delivery person recounted how a homeowner met him at the door with a mug of hot chocolate and thanked him for all his hard work. The delivery man said it was the only time he felt seen all week.

The message of Christmas from today's verses is that God sees you. Matthew shared the angel's instruction to Joseph to call the child Immanuel, which means "God with us." God didn't shout His love from the clouds. He didn't write a love note in the sky. He stepped into the story right where we are as Immanuel.

Jesus's arrival in Bethlehem means we are never alone. When you are sitting in the waiting room worried, He's right there with you. When you're up at night waiting for a loved one to arrive home safely, He's with you. In the quiet moments following a heartbreak, He's right there. In the ordinary spaces of your daily routines, Jesus is there. God's presence doesn't depend on our performance. He has promised His presence, and He always keeps His promises. Carols like "O Come, All Ye Faithful," help us express the awe we feel as we acknowledge His nearness.

- **How have you seen God's presence in the ordinary moments of your life?**
- **Thank God for being Immanuel who is with you. Praise Him that you are never alone even in the toughest circumstances. Ask for an awareness of His presence so you can rest in Him.**

DAY 3

John 8:12

Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

A group of miners were trapped underground for over two weeks in India. When rescuers finally broke through and began bringing the men out, one miner immediately covered his eyes. After being in total darkness for days, the bright light was too much for him to handle. That miner later said the moment he saw the light, he knew he was alive and saved.

That's what Jesus meant when He said that He was the Light of the world and whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness. Sin, fear, and confusion can trap us like those miners. Deep in darkness it can be difficult to find our way out. The good news is that when Christ steps in, He brings light. Don't think of it like Him handing you a flashlight, but rather He is your light. His presence exposes what's hidden and brings healing where there is shame. The world tries to light our path with self-help, working harder, achieving more, or other forms of success. While those may seem shiny or bright, they are more like a flickering light that will burn out eventually. Only Jesus offers the steady, eternal light that never burns out.

When you step into His light, everything changes. Old patterns of behavior lose their grip. Hope begins growing where despair once thrived. The faithful are called to come and worship the Savior. Every time you choose truth over comfort, His way over the world's way, then you reflect His light to a dark world that desperately needs it.

- **How can you reflect Jesus's light in your life at work, home, school, athletics, or relationships this week?**
- **Praise Jesus for being the Light of the world and shining in the darkness around you. Ask Him to shine His truth into every part of your life and reveal anything that needs your attention. Commit to reflecting His light to those around you.**

DAY 4

John 10:11-15

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. This happens because he is a hired hand and doesn't care about the sheep. "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep."

Sheep are herd animals and will follow the sheep in front of them without question. That is one reason why shepherds are so important to protect and lead their flocks. Shepherds will put themselves in danger to protect the sheep from predators and historically would even sleep across the entrance to caves or pens where they gathered the flocks at night.

That's the heart behind the Good Shepherd, Jesus. He lays down His life for His sheep. As you sing to and worship the Savior this Christmas season, keep in mind that you are worshiping the One who is both the King who reigns and the Good Shepherd who cares about you. Earthly leaders often take advantage of those they are meant to protect. That never happens with Jesus. He leads with compassion, grace, and mercy.

The Good Shepherd never abandons His sheep when they wander off. He goes after those who stray. When the world distracts us and pulls us into danger, He calls us by name, restores our souls, and leads us to the life-giving water we need. That's worth our worship and adoration.

- **Where do you need the care and protection of the Good Shepherd right now?**
- **Thank Jesus for being your Good Shepherd and caring about you deeply. Praise Him for the times He has come after you and led you back into the fold safely. Ask Him to teach you to trust His voice above all others.**

DAY 5

Scripture Reference Revelation 5:11-13

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands. They said with a loud voice,

Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!

I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say,

Blessing and honor and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!

Think about the last Super Bowl or major championship game you watched, either in person or on television. At the end of the game, typically confetti rains down on the field or court. As those present are bathed in colorful paper, the trophy is lifted high and the fans roar with excitement. These are the pictures and sounds of victory. One day the sounds of heaven will drown out all earthly noise with the chorus of “Worthy is the Lamb!” It will be a celebration beyond any other.

Revelation paints a picture of the eternal celebration in Christ. Every creature in heaven and on earth will join the anthem to declare blessing and honor and power and glory to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever. As we sing to and worship the Lord now, we are rehearsing for that day. Our worship joins heaven’s song and we get to be part of the adoration that Jesus so deserves. The Lamb who was slain in our place is also the King who conquered sin and death forever.

We must live today with our eyes on that future. We don’t need to fear anything the world brings against us because we know the end of the story. The faithful adore now what the whole of creation will adore forever.

- **How should this picture of heaven shape your worship today?**
- **Confess your sins and ask God to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Ask Him to help you live faithfully today in light of His victory. Praise Him for giving you a picture of the future and respond with worship and adoration.**

O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL

IS. 9:6; LUKE 2:13-16; JOHN 1:14; REV. 17:14 DECEMBER 21, 2025

MAIN POINT

God's Word calls us to faithfully come and adore Jesus as the victorious King.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

During the 2013 Super Bowl, there was a power outage that lasted about 34 minutes. Within a few seconds of the stadium going dark, spectators began holding up their phones with their flashlight apps turned on. Before long the entire stadium glowed with all the individual lights working together. What started out as darkened silence turned into unity as the fans lit up the space with light. Christmas calls people to come together around the light to make a difference in this dark world. The Light of the world, whose birth we celebrate, can't be overcome. Our Christmas carol this week, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," is a summons to join in with the song of the angels and proclaim glory to God in the highest. Jesus has come.

- **Have you ever experienced a power outage in a large place like an arena?**
- **What kind of difference does even a small light make in such darkness?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have a volunteer read Luke 2:13-16 and John 1:14

From the first minutes of Jesus's earthly life, the news that God's gift of peace had arrived spread quickly. During that dark, quiet night, a group of shepherds were visited by angelic messengers and the truth about Jesus began to be known. Not surprising is the fact that the angel's announcement was accompanied by other angles who were praising God. The most appropriate response to news about Jesus is praise. We can imagine the sky being filled with these angelic beings who were worshiping the King of kings and demonstrating how we should respond to the Messiah also—with awe and worship.

- **How does the angels' reaction to the birth of Jesus encourage or challenge you?**

It is encouraging that God chose shepherds to hear news of the Savior first. Though they were not the elite of society, these men were faithful to listen to and obey the angels call to come and worship. Once they confirmed what the angels told them, we see that the shepherds didn't keep the good news to themselves. Part of being faithful is not keeping the good news of the gospel to oneself. They immediately went and spread the word about the miracle they had seen. Not content with receiving the hope of Christ for themselves, they wanted others to know about the miracle they had seen and experienced following the angelic announcement.

- **What can you do to help people see Jesus rightly?**

The actions of the shepherds give us an additional example to follow as we think about people who don't yet know Jesus. We are to be faithful like the angels in worship and the shepherds in evangelism because Jesus deserves our full worship and our witness. Jesus came to bring us peace with God but also with other people. Faithfulness is more about being responsive than being flawless. The shepherds simply responded in obedience and awe as they moved toward Jesus, the Word, who became flesh and dwelled among us.

- **What can you learn from the shepherds about how to respond to Jesus?**

> *Have a volunteer to read Isaiah 9:6 and Revelation 17:14.*

At Christmas we celebrate the arrival of the sovereign King Jesus. Isaiah declared He would come and carry the names Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. The baby in the manger was not simply a good man or a prophet, He was the fulfillment of the promises of God. This truth is fundamental and is the rock we stand on when the world feels shaky or uncertain.

- **How have you found faithfulness to God difficult when life is heavy or hard?**

This week's carol is a call to continue coming back to Jesus, again and again. As we do, we signify who we put our faith and trust in and show the world we are His. Our worship reflects our affection. When we practice faithful adoration of Christ, everything else finds its rightful place. We can look forward to the day described in Revelation when the Lamb will triumph finally. The angels announced His first arrival with glorious worship, and they will sing again when He returns. Until then, we seek faithfulness as we long for eternity.

- **How does knowing the end of God's story from Revelation give you hope in the middle of your current circumstances?**
- **How can you keep this reality before you so you will continue in faithfulness to Jesus?**

APPLICATION

Offer the following action steps for the application of God's Word.

- **What does godly faithfulness look like in daily life?**
- **How does adoring Christ reflect your worship of Him?**
- **What is one way you will "go and tell" about the difference Jesus can make in life?**

PRAY

Praise Jesus for being both the humble baby who came to earth and the reigning King of kings.

ISAIAH 9:6

Twice earlier in this section of Isaiah, the birth of children has been described as having prophetic significance (7:14; 8:1–4). For a third time, the reader learns of a future birth. Some commentators believe the text means that this future royal child will be a purely human descendant of David who will be proclaimed king and lead God’s people to a new level of freedom and prosperity. Both Hezekiah and Josiah have been identified as this child. However, the titles given to this child and the description of his kingdom far surpass anything applicable to Hezekiah or Josiah. The only feasible interpretation of this passage is messianic. This child will be given names that signify his character. He will be a sage characterized by extraordinary wisdom (Wonderful Counselor). He will have life that is never ending (Eternal Father). He will bring peace (Prince of Peace). But the most extraordinary thing of all that confirms he is simply not to be identified with a Hezekiah or a Josiah is his title, Mighty God (cp. 8:21). In the NT, Jesus is identified as the Davidic descendant who fulfilled this great promise (Mt 1:1, 22–23).

LUKE 2:13-16

2:13–14 The praise of the heavenly host is well-known today as the “Gloria in Excelsis Deo,” from the first words of v. 14 in the Latin Vulgate (Glory to God in the highest). To give “glory to God” does not give him something he otherwise lacks. Rather, it is a confession of the wondrous glory he forever possesses. The peace to be found on earth was not the Pax Romana (the “universal peace” of the Roman Empire) but peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rm 5:1; see Lk 1:78–79). The people whom God favors are those who have found God’s undeserved favor, or grace, through Christ.

2:15 What has happened refers to the birth of the Savior, who is Christ and Lord (see vv. 11–12).

2:16 On lying in the manger, see v. 7.

JOHN 1:14

The Word continues the theme of 1:1. Became flesh does not mean the Word stopped being God; rather, the Word was made flesh. Dwelt among us literally means “pitched his tent” (Gk skenoō), an allusion to God’s dwelling among the Israelites in the tabernacle (Ex 25:8–9; 33:7). In the past God demonstrated his presence to his people in the tabernacle and the temple. Now God has taken up residence among his people in the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17). The references to God’s glory hark back to OT passages that describe the manifestation of God’s presence and glory in theophanies (appearances of God), the tabernacle, or the temple (Ex 33:22; Nm 14:10; Dt 5:22). The Greek word monogenēs underlying one and only Son from the Father means “only child” (Jdg 11:34; Jr 6:26; Am 8:10; Zch 12:10). “Only” may mean “one of a kind,” as in the case of Isaac, who is called Abraham’s “one of a kind” son in Gn 22:2, 12, 16 (in contrast to Ishmael, cp. Heb 11:17). In the OT, Israel and the Son of David are called God’s “firstborn” son (see Ps 89:27). The reference to God’s “giving” of his “one and only Son” in Jn 3:16, 18 may allude to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac (Gn 22).

Full of grace and truth recalls “faithful love (Hb chesed) and truth (Hb emet)” in Ex 34:6 (cp. Ex 33:18–19), where the expression refers to God’s covenant faithfulness to his people Israel. According to John, God’s covenant faithfulness found ultimate expression in his sending of his “one and only Son,” Jesus (see 1:14).

REVELATION 17:14

The battle here takes place at the second coming of Christ (the Lamb ... Lord of lords and King of kings; note the reversed wording from “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” 19:16). This verse clarifies that the armies following the Lamb in 19:14 are believers since the combined terms called, chosen, and faithful are never used of angels.

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