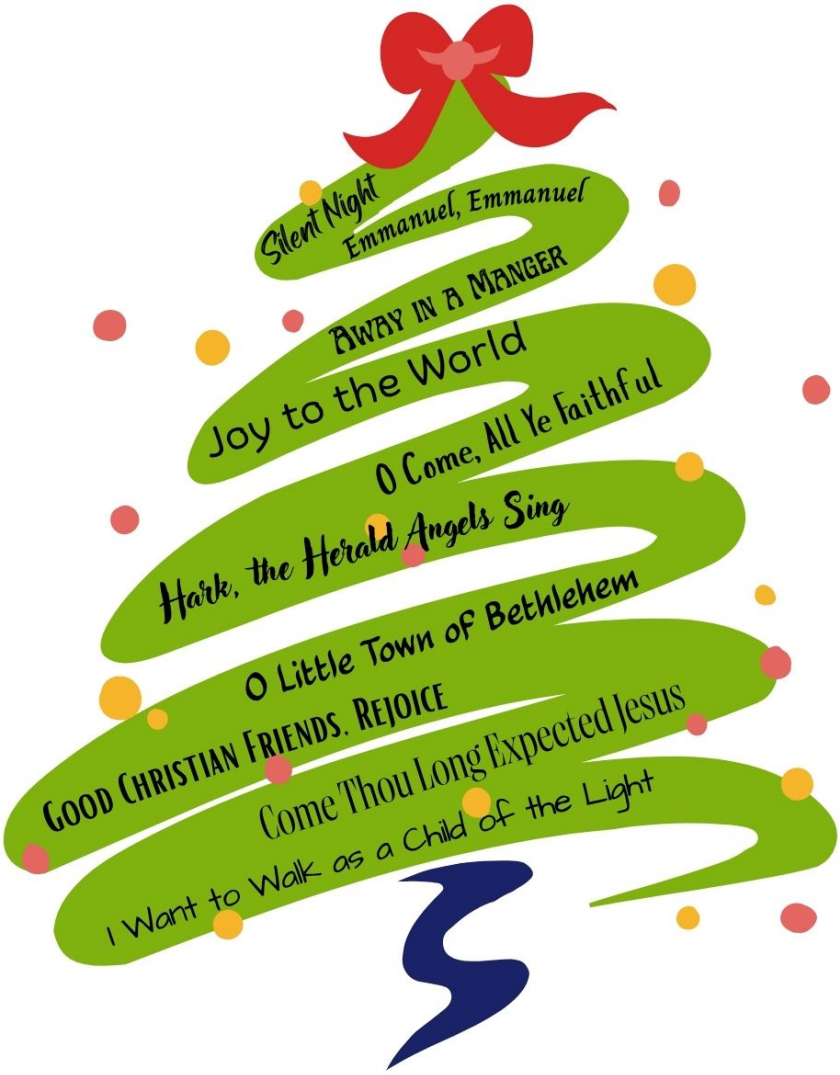
Sing We Now of Advent and Christmas!



North Liberty First
A **United Methodist** Community of Faith
www.NLFirstUMChurch.org

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The *Sing We Now of Advent and Christmas* devotions give us an opportunity to reflect on the music and the beauty of the season.

From songs of yearning for Christ's return (the essential message of Advent) to the courage of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to the celebration of the birth of Emmanuel – God with us, we have found that music captures the emotion of the season and has the ability to transport us to fond memories while at the same time inviting us share the joy and hope of Christmas with others!

It is our prayer, as you read these devotions written by our church family, that you will be blessed with sweet memories and inspired to share a song and a word of good cheer as we revel in God's great love for the world.

With a few exceptions, the songs included may be found in the United Methodist Hymnal, The Faith We Sing and Worship and Song. What a joy it will be to sing these songs throughout the Advent Season! Thank you to everyone who wrote a devotion for us!

Have a blessed Advent and Christmas Season!

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Note: these are the questions each author answered in their devotion:

A. Why you selected this song – memory or special emotion
B. What is the background of the song
C. What do you like as a bible verse to go with this song
D. A short prayer

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light – David Mendoza

I chose this song because it reminds me of how I want to live. I want to always bring light to those around me.

Several passages out of the Bible inspired this song and it talks about Jesus being the light. This song is sung at more than just Christmas time which is super fun. A Bible passage that this song reminds me of is **Ephesians 5:8**

> "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord,
> so live your life as children of light."

Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us a chance to live. Deliver us from evil, give us our daily bread. Every day is like a new chance to start over. Amen.



God Almighty, We are Waiting – Addy Reynolds

I picked this song because it is a more modern song with a message that is important for us all.

Written by Ann Bell Worley in 2005. She wrote it because she wanted to fill a gap in music that most people overlooked or ignored, the hymn looks back to the birth of Christ, looks forward to the coming kingdom, and prays for "in the meantime" living on earth.

1. God Almighty, we are waiting for a savior to appear.

Meet us in our desert journey; give a sign that you are near:

burning bushes, parted waters, food aplenty in the wild.

As we look for signs and wonders, help us see you in a child.

2. God Incarnate, we are waiting for the feast day of your birth.

Looking back and looking forward to the Christ's return to earth.

Help us to proclaim the gospel, 'til the world is reconciled.

Let us set your holy table for each woman, man, and child.

3. God, the Spirit, we are waiting for your presence here and now.

Humbled by our sinful weakness, at your mercy we will bow.

Search our hearts and make us ready, speak in language strong and mild,

help each one of us, your people, to receive you like a child

A Bible verse that goes with the song is **Isaiah 26:8**

"Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you;
your name and renown are the desires of our hearts."

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for our friends and family and the music that we use to worship and cherish you. Amen.



Here I am to Worship – Alison Hanson

I have sung this song many times at many different churches and every time that I sing it, it moves me. This song creates the longing for a strong relationship with God our Creator, who came to the earth to save us and have a relationship with us.
This song was written by Tim Hughes, who was a student at Sheffield University at the time. The song came to Hughes as he was meditation on Philippians 2. He began writing until he had two verses done. The chorus was a struggle for him, but eventually many months later he came up with the chorus. The bridge is a personal response to the scripture passage.

Philippians 2: 1-11

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:
Though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.
But he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.
When he found himself in the form of a human,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Therefore, God highly honored him
and gave him a name above all names,
so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Prayer: Lord, we will never understand what it cost for you to be on that cross for us. Thank you for coming to our broken and hurting world to have a relationship with us. Thank you for continuing to walk with us each day as we care for your kingdom here on earth. Be with us as we move through this season and help us to remember that your goodness can shine through even the smallest of things. Amen.



Send Your Word, O Lord, Like the Rain – Charlie Hershberger

I chose this song because when looking at it, it looked cool, and when I listened to it, it sounded nice.

The song helps lead us to God's ways and creativity in the world. It is a prayer to Jesus for the healing and renewal of the world.

A Bible verse that goes with this song is **Isaiah 55:10-11**

> "Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and don't return without watering the earth making it conceive and yield plants and providing seed to the Sower and food to the eater, so is my word that comes from my mouth it does not return to me empty. Instead, it does what I want I intend."

Let us pray, Oh Lord, may the impact of my actions reflect positively from the words you have shared with me. Amen

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus – Carrie McKnight

I chose this honestly because when I see the name of the piece, I just start singing it.
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" is a beloved Christian hymn written by **Charles Wesley in 1744**. Wesley was a prolific hymn writer and a key figure in the Methodist movement, alongside his brother John Wesley.

The hymn was published during a time of significant social hardship in England. Wesley was deeply concerned about poverty, injustice, and the spiritual needs of ordinary people. He wanted Christians to remember that Jesus came not only to save individuals from sin but also to bring hope, freedom, peace, and the promise of God's kingdom.

The hymn draws on the Old Testament longing for the promised Messiah—the One God had promised to send to rescue His people. Christians understand that promise to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Its message is especially meaningful during **Advent**, the season leading up to Christmas when Christians prepare their hearts to celebrate Christ's birth and reflect on His promised return.

Isaiah 9:6 (KJV)

> "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6, King James Version

Prayer:

> Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your faithfulness throughout the generations and for the promise of a Savior. As Your people waited in hope for the coming Messiah, teach us to wait with expectant hearts and to trust in Your perfect timing.
> Lord Jesus, You are the long-expected Savior, the hope of the world, and the joy of every longing heart. Come into the places in our lives where we need Your peace, forgiveness, healing, and grace. Free us from the fears and sins that keep us from walking closely with You.
> As we celebrate Your birth, help us remember that You came not only to dwell among us but to reign within us. May Your love shape our words, Your truth guide our decisions, and Your compassion lead us to serve others. Give hope to those who are discouraged, comfort to those who grieve, and peace to those who are anxious or troubled.
> Prepare our hearts to receive You anew this Christmas. May we live each day in the joyful expectation of Your presence and the promise of Your coming kingdom. We welcome You, Lord Jesus. Be the center of our hearts, our homes, and our lives.
> In Your holy name we pray, **Amen.**



O Come O Come Emmanuel – Jenna Brandes

My senior year of high school I was a part of the praise team at the church I attended and during our Christmas Eve service I found myself serving in many different roles throughout worship. One of those opportunities to serve came in the form of playing my alto saxophone to accompany the song "O Come O Come Emmanuel." We had both alto saxophone and bass clarinet as an accompaniment for this song, and it was such a cool way to worship and share the joy of the Advent season.

O Come O Come Emmanuel originates from 8th and 9th century ancient Christian monastic traditions. Each verse begins with an Antiphons (the "O") and it's followed by a messianic title for Jesus such as O Wisdom, O Lord, O Root of Jesse, O key of David, O Dayspring, O King of Nations and O Emmanuel (God with us). If you take the first letter of the titles in reverse Latin order, (E-R-R-C-S-V-O → ERO CRAS) it translates to "Tomorrow I will come." John Mason Neal was an Anglican priest and scholar who translated the hymn into English and initially published it at "Draw nigh, draw night, Emmanuel".

> "Therefore. The Lord will give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel" - Isaiah 7:14
> O Emmanuel: "Therefore. The Lord will give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel" - Isaiah 7:14
> O Wisdom: "But to those who are called – both Jews and Greeks – Christ is God's power and God's wisdom" - 1 Corinthians 1:24
> O Lord of Might: "When morning dawned on the third day, there was thunder, lightning, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud blast of a horn. All the people in the camp shook with fear. Moses brough the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their place at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD had come down on it with lightning. The smoke went up like the smoke of a hot furnace while the whole mountain shook violently" - Exodus 19:16-18
> O Rod of Jesse: "A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots" - Isaiah 11:1
> O Key of David: "I will place the key to David's house on his shoulder; what he opens no one will close, and what he closes no one will open." - Isaiah 22:22
> O Day Spring: "Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace." - Luke 1:78-79
> O Desire of Nations: "Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. WIth his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us." - Ephesians 2:14

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are a God of power, wisdom and might. So often we stray from you and your word, and yet you remain persistent in our lives. Thank you for sending your son to be Emmauel – to be here with us – as we travel throughout life and throughout this Advent season. May you guide us and be with us as we travel a road less traveled so that we may rejoice in you. Amen.

Light the Advent Candle – Kathy Boyd

Light the Advent Candle evokes a special memory that goes back about 65 years. My family not only celebrated Advent in church before Christmas, but also at home.

My mother made a point of cutting fresh greens from our Juniper bushes or Blue Spruce tree at the corner of the front yard to make aa beautiful wreath to put on the table in the dining room. Four candles with one being a different color to be the Christ candle.
My folk's had an antique portable pump organ that we set up in the living room and we would pick a hymn to play (either my older brother or I would take turns playing). We would read from the Bible and close in prayer.

This brought our family very close at Christmas - My older brother and younger brother and I were young ages and as we grew older we attended our church service and celebrated with the lighting of the candles. As Dennis and I started our famiy, we began the tradition as well. We always had at home an organ or piano to play a Christmas song during our ceremony of the Advent wreath and lighting of the remembrance candles. We have Remembered through the years in love.

The Author and composer was Mary Lu Walker (1926-2012) was an American folk musician singer-songwriter, and activist. It was originally featured in her 1975 collection and recording titled "Dandelions", published by The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in New York.

It is written in a simple, memorable 7.7.7.7. meter with a recurring chorus, making it easy for children and congregations to sing week by week. Each verse corresponds to a step in the four-week Advent wreath tradition.

Verse 1: the start of waiting for Christmas Day
Verse 2: Recalls the humble shepherds at night.
Verse 3: Celebrates the heavenly harmony of angels singing of peace on earth.
Verse 4: Focuses on everlasting joy and the Christ Child born in a stable.
Verse 5: Transitions to lighting the Christmas candles to celebrate the birth of the King.

Two books of the Bible Matthew and Luke. Luke 2: 1-20 contain the familiar Christmas story including the birth of Jesus, the manger, the shepherds, and the angels proclaiming Christs' birth. I like Luke 1:26-38. The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will give birth to Jesus. Luke 2:1-7 - Jesus is born in Bethlehem and laid in a manager. Luke 2: 8-20. The angels announce Jesus' birth to the shepherds, who go to see the baby. Usually, the church names each week's candles.



Prayer: Dear Father, each week before the celebration of the birth of your son, Jesus Christ, help me to take time to remember how truly special He is to me. Thank you, Father.

Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming – Lynn Jansen

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as those of old have sung.
It came, a flower bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.

Isaiah hath foretold it, the Rose I have in mind,
With Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

O Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
Dispel in glorious splendor the darkness everywhere,
True man yet very God, from sin and death now save us,
And share our every load.

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming is one of my favorite Advent songs. I was first attracted to it because of the lovely melody and harmonies that made it so pleasant to hear – especially sung in 4-parts! It is quiet, calming and filled with such joy. Over the years, I have had at least three different vocal groups learn and sing this beautiful song.

The song was originally written back in 1599 in Germany (Es Ist Ein Rose) and was harmonized into 4 parts in 1609. The first two verses were in German and were translated to English in 1894, The 3rd verse was added in 1940. The words talk about Jesus as the "Rose" and "Flower", how he was born in the winter and how it was all predicted by Isaiah. The final verse expresses the hope for salvation.

Isaiah 35: 1 The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom, like the crocus.
Psalm 84: 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord:
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.



Prayer: Gracious God, in this season of anticipation, we thank you for all you have given us and we look to you to continue to help us, to bless this world and help us remember all over again the joy of the birth of Christ. Amen.

Sing We Now of Christmas – Brenda Conry

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

My parents kept a stack of Christmas albums on the spindle of the record player. (Kids, ask your grandparents what that was.) There was a mix of religious and secular Christmas music. We'd play the stack then flip it and play the other sides. Then flip it again. Christmas music around the clock. I got a lot of exposure to the genre as a kid. I loved this tune from my childhood. The minor key and the simplicity of it appealed to me. I didn't know how ancient it was. A traditional French carol from 15th or 16th century! It may have been the style of the period that I liked so well.

Sing We Now of Christmas encapsulates in a few verses the story the Charlie Brown kids got a school play out of. The Gospels were even wordier. I think hymns are the best way to learn the gospel stories for children with short attention spans. 🙂



Prayer: Dear God, remind us to remember the Christ child with childlike enthusiasm and raise our voices in simple joy at His birth. Amen.



Once in Royal David's City - Rev. Deborah Coble

Every Christmas Eve morning, you'll find me listening to the live broadcast of the *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* from King's College, Cambridge. I've kept this tradition for years.

It's become my own quiet way of settling my heart before the flurry of Christmas Eve worship - and every year, the service opens the same way. A single boy soprano steps away from the choir, and from the back of that vast, dark chapel comes the first unaccompanied verse of "Once in Royal David's City." Nobody knows which boy has been chosen until the moment he begins to sing. One voice, one candle, and then the choir and organ and congregation join in, verse by verse, until the whole place is singing. It gets me every time. It's a little picture of what Christmas does: one small voice in Bethlehem, and the song has been spreading through the world ever since.

The hymn was written by Cecil Frances Alexander and published in 1848 in her book Hymns for Little Children. She had a gift for teaching the faith through song (she also gave us "All Things Bright and Beautiful.") This hymn was written to help children understand what it means that Jesus was "born of the Virgin Mary." The tune has that gentle, walking rhythm that suits a story that begins with a long journey to a little town.

The words begin in Bethlehem, royal because it was David's city, but lowly in every other way - a manger for a bed, cattle shed for a home. Then verse three makes the turn toward Nazareth: the Son of God "honored and obeyed" his mother, growing up in an ordinary family like ours. And by the final verses we're no longer looking back at the manger at all - we're looking ahead: "And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love." It is an Advent hymn as much as a Christmas one. The child in the manger is coming again, and we will see him in all his glory.

Micah 5:2 is the Bible verse that helps center us on Gods promises:

> "But you, Bethlehem... from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." God's great promises keep arriving in small places - and through small voices.

Prayer: Faithful God, thank you for songs that carry us - from a boys' choir in Cambridge, to a manger in Bethlehem, all the way home to you. Keep our eyes on the child of Bethlehem, and our hearts waiting for the day we shall see him. Amen.



Joseph's Song – Words & Music by Michael Card – **Dave Jansen**

V1:How could it be? This baby in my arms,
sleeping now, so peacefully? The Son of God, the Angel said,
How could it be?



V2: Lord I know, he's not my own.
Not of my flesh, seems not of my bones.
Still, Father let – this baby be, the Son of my love.

Father, show me where I fit into this plan of Yours,
How can a man be father to the Son of God?
Lord for all my life I've been a simple carpenter.
How can I raise a King,
How can I raise a King?

V3:He looks so small, His face and hands so fair.
And when He cries, the sun just seems to disappear.
But when He laughs, it shines again.
How could it be.

I chose Joseph's song because I've sung this song on numerous Christmas eve services in church and our kids growing up really enjoyed listening to this and counted it as part of their tradition. It brings back those memories plus it stirs the memories of my children's births and the overwhelming joy that I felt as I held each child in my arms for the first time, and the awesome responsibility that I felt for these little ones as we began our journey together.
The background is shortly after the birth of Christ in the manger as Joseph and Mary were together, prior to all the visitors arriving, sharing the miracle of Christ's birth and Joseph in his sense of wonder asking if he was up to the task.

Bible verse that encapsulates the nativity scene would be **Luke 2:4-20**

Prayer: Lord as we journey through this season of celebration, help us to remember the two people who initially said yes to your plan and your will. Their steadfast faith allowed the one true miracle of your Son to come to earth and for our eyes to be opened to the wonder of your ultimate gift of love. Amen

What Child Is This (1871) – Deb Brastrom

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary.

Why lies he in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here, The silent word is pleading.

Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the word made flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come peasant, king, to own him;
The king of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.

Raise, raise the song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby;
Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
The babe, the son of Mary.

I especially like this carol because the Renaissance melody is so timeless and everlasting. The lyrics not only recount Jesus' birth (Christmas) but also point to His death and resurrection (Easter), thereby tying together the two main holy days of Christianity.

The lyrics were written by William Chatterton Dix (1837 - 1898) who was an Anglican layman, born in Bristol, England. He settled in Glasgow, Scotland, where he became a successful insurance salesman. As a young man of twenty-nine, Dix was stricken by a serious illness and was confined to bed for some time, but through it all he met God in a very personal way. His spiritual experience led to the composition of this hymn and many others.

The tune for this Christmas hymn was sung long before the words were written. "Greensleeves" is an English folk song that can be traced back as far as the 1500s. Shakespeare even mentioned it in one of his plays.
The song pairs well with the story of Jesus' birth as found in Matthew 1:18 - 2:12 and Luke 2:1-20.

Prayer: Heavenly Father - During this Advent and Christmas season we celebrate the birth of your son, Jesus Christ. At the same time, we recognize that his birth foreshadows his ultimate death and resurrection and the salvation that brings to each of us. Help us to truly appreciate the amazing gift you sent to us in the form of "the babe, the son of Mary". Amen



It Came Upon a Midnight Clear - Brenda McAllister

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" has endured as a beloved Christmas carol, praised of its ethereal imagery of angels and timeless message of peace. We, as listeners, are reminded of the spiritual and social dimensions of the Christmas message. For instance, shepherding was a profession despised by the elite.

Shepherds lived in the fields, which implies homelessness. It was a hot, humid climate so they felt downtrodden. Imagine being outside on a clear night with only stars in the sky, no moon. Standing or sitting on the hillside, admiring a shooting star, or looking at the constellations. Hearing the soft lowing of cattle or the bleating of sheep. When suddenly the sky lights up with a Heavenly Host of Angels singing? I get goosebumps just writing that. This is the reason I picked this song.

I like to close my eyes and just imagine how it would have been for those Shepards. Their hearts beating out of their chests. Their rapid breathing. Fight or Flight sets in…. Their first thought was of how to protect the sheep from whatever this was then wanting to run but then realizing the angels were not there to hurt them but were singing songs of GREAT JOY! What an amazing site to behold!

The announcement of Jesus's birth came **first** to the humble shepherds. The good news about Jesus is that he comes to all, including the plain and ordinary. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. You do not need extra ordinary qualifications. He accepts you exactly as you are. The next time you are out under the clear night sky just pause and take a little time to imagine what you would do if an Angel suddenly appeared in front of you, singing good tidings of great joy. What would you have to say about your "Midnight Clear?"

The Hymn "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" was written in 1849 by Edmund H. Sears, a Unitarian Minister from Wayland, Massachusetts. He was suffering from illness and was downhearted. During this time there was much social and political unrest. (Sound familiar?) This was the aftermath of the Mexican American war, the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law and the Gold Rush. There was also unrest and revolutionary movements occurring in Europe. He wanted to write something that would give us hope. He wrote five verses, but most hymnals only publish four and one hymnal I checked only published three verses.

The poem was then set to music in 1850 by Richard Storrs Willis using the tune "Carol". The poem was also paired with "Noel," adapted by Sir Arthur Sullivan from an English folk melody which was a customary practice of the time. The Willis tune remains the most popular version in the United States today.

This hymn is considered one of the earliest examples of a social gospel hymn. This hymn does not focus primarily on the Nativity as other Christmas Carols do but on contemporary issues of war, peace, and human suffering. Sears seeks to contrast the "Babel sounds" of human strife with the angels' message by putting emphasis on peace and goodwill.

The Scripture passage this hymn reminds me of is **Luke 2:8-14**

Prayer: Dear Gracious one: Thank you for sending angels when we need them. Thank you for sharing your precious Son with this world even though we did not deserve it. Thank you for your unending grace that continues to cover us even though we may fall short at times. Thank you for music that tells beautiful stories. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, Amen.



O Little Town of Bethlehem – Bryan Westlake

I selected this Christman carol because it reminds me of the reason for the season, the birth of our savior Jesus, in a humble setting. I especially remember caroling to shut ins and how this song would bring tears of joy to everyone.

This carol was written by Phillips Brooks in 1868 with music by Lewis Redner in the United States. Brooks was an Episcopal priest, who visited Bethlehem in1865 and was moved by the town's quiet and humble atmosphere during Christmas. It's first performance was on December 27, 1868.

Luke 2:7

> "And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for sending Jesus - the Light that was is and is to come - in a richer, deeper way.



Love Came Down at Christmas – Margaret Adams



1. Love came down at Christmas,
   Love all lovely, Love divine;
   Love was born at Christmas;
   star and angels gave the sign.

2. Worship we the Godhead,
   Love incarnate, Love divine;
   worship we our Jesus,
   but wherewith for sacred sign?

3. Love shall be our token;
   love be yours and love be mine;
   love to God and others,
   love for plea and gift and sign.

Love Came Down at Christmas has always been a favorite of mine – it's short, but the entire song emphasizes love – God's boundless love; Jesus' unconditional, selfless, and transformative love that is so central to his mission and teachings; and that this love is a gift and a sign meant for every person. The lyrics are simple, and the idea of God manifesting his love to all of us through Jesus Christ as a human baby makes it so relatable to us.

"Love Came Down at Christmas" was written by the English poet Christina Georgina Rossetti in 1885.

The Bible passage that this hymn reminds me of is: **1 John 4:7-12**

> Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us.

Prayer: Oh God - You sent Love down at Christmas in the birth of your son Jesus. You showed us what unconditional, transformational love looks like in a way we could understand. Help us, Oh Lord, to follow your example, and help us to receive and live out your great love in the season of Christmas, and always. Amen

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” – Barbara Van Gorp

This song was selected as I love the history and the melody. It brings back memories of my grandfather, Edward Van Gorp - a trained pilot for the 1st World War. He said he liked this carol because the world needed peace. His son - my father, Perry Van Gorp, was later stationed in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, immediately after World War II where he toured Europe playing trumpet in the Army Band. He has memories of singing this in chapel, playing carols on the trumpet and hearing the beautiful church bells through Europe on Sunday mornings. When we took dad back to his base in 2024, we were able to experience in-person his memory of the European church bells ringing.

The history of this song is also set in a time of war - the Civil War. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the American poet, wrote the poem in 1863 on Christmas Day as he was grieving the loss of his spouse and fearful of the war as his son had suffered a wound to his back and shoulder. Henry was surrounded by grief and fear of the war tearing apart the United States of America as cannons were tearing apart the traditions of Christmas and the South. Yet while he was pondering these thoughts, he heard the bells of church towers, reminding him of life, faith and hope. This reminder is a stark contrast to his pain and despair of war. Instead, the sounds of the church bells inspire Henry with a hope for true peace and goodwill to ALL men on earth. His words of wisdom in this poem are first published in 1865 in the “Our Young Folks” - *The Atlantic.* The poem was first set to a hymn in 1872 by organist John Baptiste Calkin. Later, the updated melody was recorded in 1956 by Bing Crosby and is what we are familiar with today.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

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

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
“ There is no peace on earth,” I said;
“For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Psalm 43 is part of the 2nd book of Psalms. It is part of the 7 Psalms written for the "Sons of Korah" and is written as a lamentation prayer for those suffering, asking God to act as an advocate against those oppressing him. Some historians feel it is a continuation of Psalm 42, that starts with the words "as a deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee" from a common modern Christian tune. Turning back to the verses of Psalm 43, it is a prayer for us today to not be dismayed or feel despair, instead the psalmist has memories of worshipping God.

Psalm 43: 3-4, the psalmist longs to the return to the "holy mountain" also known as Mount Zion, the earthly "center of God's kingdom" at this time in history. The psalmist then pictures himself praising God with song and joy being able to worship again with the lyre and music. Longfellow mirrors this in verses 4-6 of the poem above regarding the lament and fear from grief and war, verses 1-3 showing the pleasant memories of the Christendom celebrating the words of peace and good-will to men. Finally, verse 7 of the poem, Longfellow reflects that God is present with us thru all good and bad. God is not dead and doesn't sleep. In His time, God does bring peace to all and courage.

Longfellow the poet and the Psalmist in the 43rd Psalm reminds us of the promise we find during Advent: God sending us a Saviour, giving us the HOPE and unconditional LOVE for the world until Christ returns again. It does not mean we may have seasons of lamenting, persecution, loss and struggles. Yet we are not alone. There is a community that gives JOY as Christians unite to praise God and that truly work together to give God's PEACE to all on earth – no matter their race, economic status, primary language or current health condition. May Christmas bells remind us to reflect on how we all can work to show God's LOVE, giving HOPE and JOY to others to experience the PEACE of Christ until the new heaven and earth unite.

Prayer: *Dear God: We know our current world struggles. There is injustice, war, cruelty, greed and a lack of kindness and mercy for those in need. We lament these actions on Earth. We pray that we can be servants of your Peace to all humans, so they may see in us the love of Christ and feel His presence. May we always strive for this, not only during the season of Advent and Christmas. We ask for your guidance to give us the nudge to be light in the world today and always. We thank you for your gift of your Son. Forgive us when we forget to share the Peace of Christ with all. Amen.*



What a Strange Way to Save the World – Lyle Muller

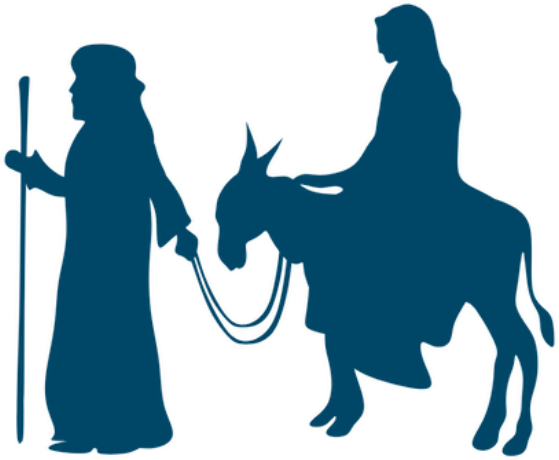
I was exposed to "What a Strange Way to Save the World" when I was in the Mission band and asked to sing it for special music one Sunday. My first thought reading the lyrics was that Joseph was kind of a me-centered guy.

"Why me?" he asks, then, "Why him?" about Jesus in the manger. Finally, he gets around to, "Why her?" As I think about the song, though, I see what he is coping with. His fiancée shows up pregnant even though he has had no intimate relationship with her. He has to make a decision about his engagement.

Then, he learns the answer to "Why me? Why him? Why her?" and he is astonished. The setting seems too humble for God's through Jesus. That humbleness and astonishment, to me, is the Christmas story because it leads to the biggest question about fulfillment of that promise: "Why us?"

The Bible reading is Matthew 1:18-25

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind me through Joseph's journey that we do not always understand your will for me. Remind me that, if I listen when you speak, I may be astonished that you have picked me for your salvation but that this is the fulfillment of your promise. Lend me an open mind for your message. Amen.



“Angels We Have Heard on High”
“Silent Night”
“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”
- Jim Mitchell



All these songs have special meaning to me,
because I remember singing them in Church.
Starting with my Grandparents and cousins, to my parents and friends growing up, to our church family today.
Special memories with special people who I love and cherished my entire life.
The primary Bible verses behind the Christmas carol **"Angels We Have Heard on High"** are Luke 2:13–14, which contain the angelic proclamation and the Latin chorus *Gloria in excelsis Deo* ("Glory to God in the highest").

Key Scripture Passages

Luke 2:13–14 (The Angelic Chorus):*"And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"*

(This passage forms the direct inspiration for the song's famous Latin refrain, "Gloria in excelsis Deo").
Christmas carol ***"Silent Night"*** is not a direct quote from a single Bible verse, but its lyrics are inspired by the biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew. [1, 2]

Key Bible Verses Behind Silent Night

Luke 2:8–12 (The Shepherds and the Savior):"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them... 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.'"
(Inspired by: "Shepherds quake at the sight... Christ the Savior is born")



The classic Christmas hymn **"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"** is not a direct Bible verse, but a hymn written by Charles Wesley in 1739 that weaves together numerous biblical passages and themes. [1, 2]
The primary biblical passages connected to the hymn's lyrics include:

Luke 2:13–14 (The Angelic Proclamation):*"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!' "*

(Note: Scripture records the angels saying/proclaiming this rather than explicitly singing it, though tradition interprets it as a song).

An Advent Prayer of Waiting and Song: "Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of your only Son, so that by His coming we may worship you with pure minds; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen." [1]

— Historic Collect for Advent (8th Century) [1]



“There’s a song in the air; there’s a star in the sky. . .” – Richard Grugin

As I type those words, I hear in my mind the melody being played by the pianist in my little home church in Callao, Missouri. Neoma played it so beautifully with octave rolls in such a way that I have never heard it replicated. As much as I have tried, I can never play it as melodiously as Neoma, but the words flow so easily in my memory when I try.

The words to “There’s a Song in the Air” were originally written by Josiah Holland in 1872 as a poem. Several years later Karl Pomeroy came across the poem and noticed how the opening lines had six syllables and the closing lines had twelve which stood out to him as an easily teachable hymn. Others had tried to use it as a Sunday school song, but that melody didn’t catch on. In 1881 Pomeroy picked out a catchy melody that fit the words on an inherited pump organ, and it later became a favorite for pianists to embellish along with congregational singing. It’s page 249 of the current United Methodist Hymnal.

Psalm 149:1 (Good News Bible)
Sing a new song to the Lord: praise him in the assembly of his faithful people!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of music to sing your praise, and for the words of hymns that bring us comfort and hope. Be with us as we continue to learn and grow in our faith as each new Advent season refreshes and secures our belief. Let the star in the sky always be our guide to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Infant Holy, Infant Lowly – Billie Feagins

I chose this song because of the melody being lullaby like. It is very comforting and beautiful.

This song reminds me of Luke 2:7

> "She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly,
> and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom."
> It is a great Christmas song.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for this song. Please let everyone have a good Christmas. I hope everyone has a good day. Amen.



Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow – Beckett Reynolds

I wrote about this song because I enjoyed how it sounded.

It was interesting to learn that it was originally an African American Spiritual. Knowing more about the song I can hear the rhythms and enjoy listening to the song. It reminds us to follow God like the disciples did.

A Bible verse that connects with this song is **Luke 2:8-15**

> "Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.
>
> The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."
>
> When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us.""

Prayer: God, Thank you for this song and for Christmas. Amen.



O Come, All Ye Faithful – Griffin Adrian

I wanted to write about this song because it sounds cool and is one that I remember singing at church.

An interesting thing that I learned is that they are not quite sure who wrote this song, but when the Duke of Leeds heard the song, he decided that he wanted to sing it and then it became popular around the world.

A Bible passage that this song reminds me of is **Luke 2:15-18**

> "When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them."

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for Jesus and Christmas. Amen.



Away in a Manger – David Mohr

I chose "Away in a Manger" for the advent devotional because it tells how Jesus was born.

The "Away in a Manger" first verse tells us how Jesus was born in a manger! The "no crying he makes" verse means that the angels were watching and comforting baby Jesus. (Did you know Jesus was going to be named Emmanuel?) This ties into my life because the star of Bethlehem can help us to locate Bethlehem like we can find Jesus with the star.

A Bible verse to go with this song is **Luke 2:7**

> "She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom."

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to earth. Thank you for music. Amen.



Come, Little Children, to the Silent Manger – Katy Feagins

“O Come, Little Children" is a famous Christmas song with a cool secret: the words and the music were made by two different people who didn't even know each other! I chose this song because of the fun tune and the great words. I also love working with children and learning the history it fit right in.

Back in 1798, a friendly schoolteacher and priest named Christoph von Schmid wrote a sweet poem about kids visiting baby Jesus in the manger. He loved to read his poems out loud as a special treat when his students finished their schoolwork.

A few years earlier, in 1794, a music composer named Johann Schulz made up a happy, cheerful tune, but it wasn't for Christmas at all—it was actually a song about springtime!

For a long time, the poem and the music were completely separate. But around 1832, another teacher named Friedrich Eickhoff had the awesome idea to glue them together. He put the Christmas words onto the springtime music, and it fit perfectly! Children all over Germany loved singing it, and soon it spread across the whole world. Today, it's so popular that it is one of the very first songs kids learn to play when they start learning the Suzuki violin!

Luke 2:15-16

> "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger."

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, as a tiny baby in a manger. Just like the children in the song, I come to you with a happy heart. Fill my life with the joy of that first Christmas night. Help me to remember the wonderful gift you gave the whole world. Keep my heart pure and gentle like the baby Jesus, and help me share your love and kindness with everyone I meet. Amen.



Go Tell It on the Mountain – Betty Mitchell

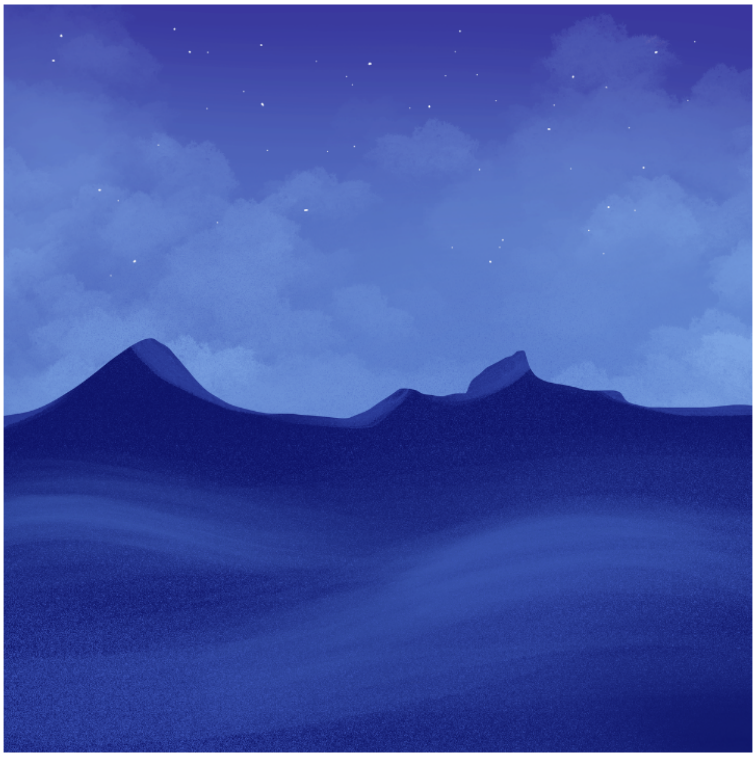
Go Tell It on the Mountain is such a joyful song that truly lifts my heart and soul. Jim used to sing it repeatedly while doing chores around the house, and his grandparents often requested it—a request he always fulfilled with great gusto (and still does!).

Go Tell it on the Mountain is an African American spiritual song, it brings a deep sense of hope, dignity, and spiritual freedom. It beautifully transforms private wonder into a joyful proclamation of Christ's birth, sharing that wonderful news everywhere—across mountains, valleys, and into our daily lives.

Isaiah 52:7

> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us the courage of the angels and the joy of the shepherds. Let us not keep your light to ourselves. Help us to shout the good news over every hill and into every valley, so the world may know that Jesus Christ is born. Amen



Welcome to our World – Brady Mancilla

I chose this song because it reminds me of times growing up hearing things like the words from this song. The words in this song are incredibly powerful.

Tears are falling, hearts are breaking
How we need to hear from God
You've been promised, we've been waiting
Welcome Holy Child [Repeat: x1]

Hope that You don't mind our manger
How I wish we could have known
But long-awaited Holy Stranger
Make Yourself at home

Please make Yourself at home
Bring Your peace into our violence
Bid our hungry souls be filled

Word now breaking Heaven's silence
Welcome to our world [Repeat: x1]

Fragile finger sent to heal us
Tender brow prepared for thorn
Tiny heart whose blood will save us
Unto us is born [Repeat: x1]

So wrap our injured flesh around You
Breathe our air and walk our sod
Rob our sins and make us holy
Perfect Son of God [Repeat: x1]
Welcome to our wo

A Bible verse that connects to this song is **Psalm 34:18**

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he saves those whose spirits are crushed."

Prayer: Dear God, hope all the prayers that you have received get answered, hope all the broken hearts get filled with joy and everyone drowned in sadness be filled with joy. Amen.



God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman – Warren Hershberger

I chose because it sounds fun and I remember singing it at church in the past. It is a popular Christmas carol from the 16th and 17th century.

Luke 2:10-11:

> "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord".

Prayer: Thank You for the beautiful reminder that Your love drives away all dismay. In moments when my heart is anxious or overwhelmed, I thank You that Your angel's message remains true today: Fear not.

I praise You for sending Jesus Christ our Savior to rescue us when we had gone astray, breaking the power of darkness and wrapping us in Your grace. Thank You for the ultimate "tidings of comfort and joy" that nothing in this world can take away.

Lord, I ask that You rest me merry—keep me strong, courageous, and steadfast in Your mighty power. Infuse my heart with a deep, abiding joy that isn't dependent on my circumstances, but on Your eternal faithfulness. Fill my home with peace and let Your love overflow through me to everyone I meet.

In the powerful and saving name of Jesus, Amen.



O Little Town of Bethlehem – Mason Powell

The song makes me feel peaceful and I've heard it before at Christmas time.

The song was written by Episcopal priest Phillips Brooks after he rode on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve in 1865. He visited the Church of the Nativity. He wrote the poem capturing the quiet wonder of that night in Bethlehem.

Luke 2:4-7

> "Since Joseph belonged to David's house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David's city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom."

Prayer: O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today. Amen.



Glory in the Highest – Olivia Powell

This song reminds me of Christmas and all of the joy and glory of the season.

The fundamental text of the hymn is the Gloria in Excelsis Deo ("Glory to God in the Highest"), which traces its linguistic origin directly to Luke 2:14—the song the angels sang to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth.

Luke 2: 8-20

> "Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.
>
> The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."
>
> When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and see what's happened. Let's confirm what the Lord has revealed to us." They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw this, they reported what they had been told about this child. Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary committed these things to memory and considered them carefully. The shepherds returned home, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Everything happened just as they had been told."

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for bringing the good news of Jesus' birth and saving us from our sins. Amen.



Good Christian Friends Rejoice – Luca Boyum

I chose this song because it sounded cool and the message was good.

The song was created because an angel appeared to the man who wrote it.

A Bible verse that goes with this song is **Luke 2:10-11**

> "The angel said, "Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord."

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for music. Let us all continue to rejoice together for your great name. Amen.



Still, Still, Still – Catherine Moore

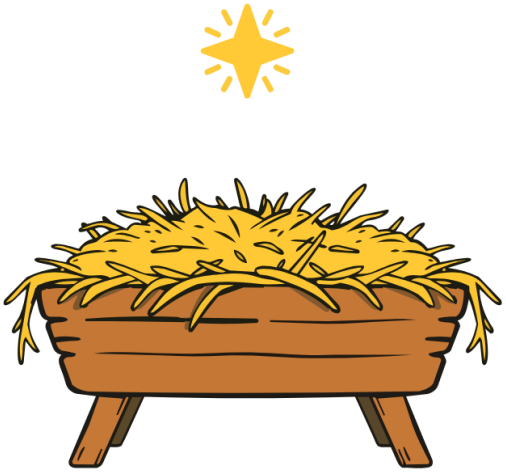
The reason I selected this song is because our band at school is currently playing it. It brings me a lot of joy. This song makes me feel calm, and it's my favorite out of all the pieces we are performing.

The song originated from the Salzburg region of Austria, which is known for its beautiful music. The song was passed down through oral tradition and was published in 1865 along with other songs.

The Bible verse that relates to this song is **Luke 2:6-7**

> "While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom." This passage speaks about the birth of Jesus Christ and connects to the theme of the song through the peacefulness surrounding Jesus birth.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, into this world. We are grateful for the wonderful people who are with us. Please provide comfort to those who are struggling with loss and those facing challenges with pregnancy. Help them find strength and healing. Amen.



The First Noel the Angel Did Say – Kara Adrian

This song is a blend of reverent awe, quiet wonder, and deep joy. It moves from the hushed stillness of a cold winter night to a triumphant, celebratory shout of good news. It's a classic song that reminds you of all the joy that Christmas brings.

It originated in the Cornwall region of England, likely dating back to the 16th or 17th century (with roots potentially as early as the 13th to 15th centuries). It was passed down through oral tradition before being published in 1823.

Luke 2:8–11 – Describes the angels appearing to the poor shepherds in the fields on a night watch to announce the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord.

Prayer: Heavenly Lord, thank you for the good news of great joy announced to the humble shepherds in the quiet night. As the star guided the wise men to the place where Jesus lay, guide our hearts through the darkness of this world to seek Your presence.
Help us, with one accord, to offer You our praise, our gifts, and our whole lives, rejoicing that the King of Israel is born. Amen.



Joy to the World – Graham Adrian

When I sing Joy to the World at church, it makes me feel happy because I remember it from my preschool. That makes me remember good times.
It celebrates the arrival of Jesus.

Psalm 98

Sing to the Lord a new song

because he has done wonderful things!

His own strong hand and his own holy arm

have won the victory!

2 The Lord has made his salvation widely known;

he has revealed his righteousness

in the eyes of all the nations.

3 God has remembered his loyal love

and faithfulness to the house of Israel;

every corner of the earth has seen our God's salvation.



4 Shout triumphantly to the Lord, all the earth!

Be happy!

Rejoice out loud!

Sing your praises!

5 Sing your praises to the Lord with the lyre—

with the lyre and the sound of music.

6 With trumpets and a horn blast,

shout triumphantly before the Lord, the king!

7 Let the sea and everything in it roar;

the world and all its inhabitants too.

8 Let all the rivers clap their hands;

let the mountains rejoice out loud altogether 9 before the Lord

because he is coming to establish justice on the earth!

He will establish justice in the world rightly;

he will establish justice among all people fairly.

Prayer: Dear God, thanks for giving me Christmas. You did all of that. Thank you!

De Tierra Lejana Venimos a Verte – Elaine Hernandez

Honestly, I first picked it because it was the first I saw on the list that hadn't been signed up for yet and I was a bit rushed for time. However, when I got into researching this hymn, I was pleasantly surprised that it is a traditional Puerto Rican hymn.

Puerto Rico is one of our most favorite vacation places, and I have a past connection to Puerto Rican veterans from when I used to work at the VAMC. I found Puerto Rican veterans to be very friendly, warm and dedicated individuals. I don't think that it is well known that there are 2 critical military bases in Puerto Rico, and they are in the top 5 states/territories for the number volunteers that sign up to serve. Iowa is also in the top 5 who have the most who sign up for military service.

Known in English as "From a Distant Home" is a traditional Puerto Rican Epiphany carol, describing the journey of the Magi following the Star of Bethlehem. The lyrics include chorus and traditional verses offering gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the newborn King , and continue to celebrate the journey of the Magi.

Mathhew 2:1-12. Coming of the Maji

Prayer: Lord Our Creator,
Thank you sending the star that led the wise men through the dark, guiding the Magi to seek and worship the newborn King. Lord When life seems uncertain, give us a heart to follow Your light, the courage to give our best treasures to You, and wisdom to walk in Your path every day.



We Three Kings – John Mohr

I chose this song because it is a popular song with a steady beat that I love. We also did a fun activity last year in youth group where we pretended to ride camels while singing this song.

John Henry Hopkins Jr. wrote this carol around 1857 based on the narrative of the journal of the magi in

Matthew 2:1-21

> "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him."
>
> When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:
> You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
> by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
> because from you will come one who governs,
> who will shepherd my people Israel."
>
> Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.
>
> When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him." Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.
>
> When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:
>
> A voice was heard in Ramah,
> weeping and much grieving.
> Rachel weeping for her children,

and she did not want to be comforted,
because they were no more.

After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. "Get up," the angel said, "and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead." Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel."

Prayer: Lord, may we learn what is important and travel great distances to achieve like the three magi did when Jesus was born. Amen.



Our souls magnify the Lord,
and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour,
for he looks with favor upon us
and sees our unrealized potential.

In the tradition of Mary,
and all who have said “yes” to God,
we stand here today,
to add our assent to theirs.

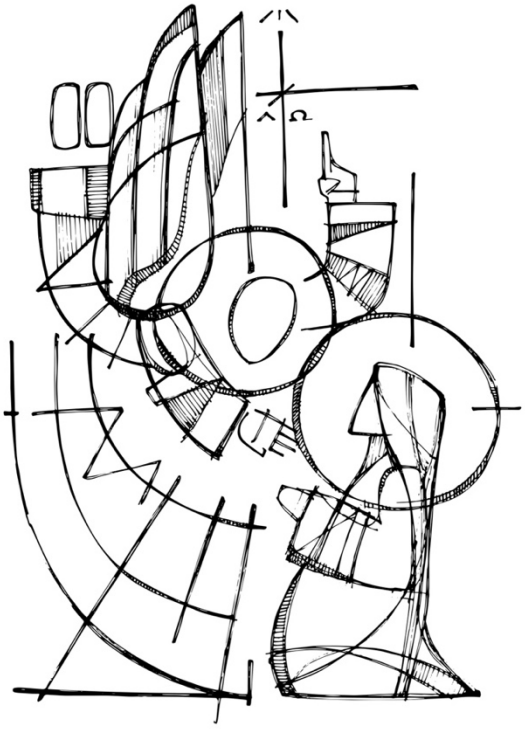
Like Mary, we feel overwhelmed;
we wonder if we are worthy,
or capable, of following the calling.

Like Mary, we have our questions
and we will not be afraid to ask them.

Like Mary, we will hear and ponder
the assurance that God will empower us.

Like Mary we will strive to say -
“Let it be with us according to your will.”

To whatever God is inviting of us
at this time in our lives,
and relying on God’s grace,
we say “yes.”



~ written by Ann Siddall, and posted on the **Stillpoint Spirituality Centre and Faith Community**

Special Holiday Fellowship

and Worship Opportunities - All are Welcome!

December 12 9:00am - noon Cookie Walk

All are invited to come and shop for cookies, candies and crafts prepared by members of the church.

December 13

9:00am Children's Christmas Program

Hear the story of the first Christmas through the eyes of our children.

5:00pm Blue Christmas A healing worship service of remembrance and hope.

December 17, 7:00pm Christmas Eve Before You Leave

Christmas Eve Service for those who travel over Christmas, with candlelight and Silent Night.

Christmas Eve - December 24th

4:00pm A family friendly Christmas Eve worship service with Silent Night and candlelight

7:00pm Silent Night, candlelight and our favorite Christmas songs.

11:00pm An unplugged Christmas Eve service with Silent Night, candlelight, and Holy Communion.

North Liberty First
A **United Methodist** Community of Faith

