

**CHURCH**

 **grace**

**Sermon Series Guide**

**Sounds of the Season**

Christmas music has a way of putting us into the Holiday spirit. There have been many great Christmas carols written over the years. When was the last time you took a moment and thought about the words of the carols or how they bring Scripture to mind without us realizing? Throughout this sermon series, we will be looking at different Christmas carols each week. We will look at the back story of the carol along with the Scripture it is based on. As Christmas approaches, we will practice Advent (which means arrival) as we look with hopeful anticipation of Jesus of Nazareth coming to earth. This series guide is broken down into 4 weeks with 5 sessions a week. Each week starts out with the theme from Advent (*Hope, Peace, Joy, Love*) connected to that Sunday. The remaining four days in that week will be looking at four different carols. Each of the four days will look at the back story of the carol and a part of the carol along with a passage of Scripture and a devotional thought based on the Biblical truth found in the carol.

Our prayer is that this series guide would provide you help to get you prepared for Christmas and the coming of the Messiah and not get lost in all the noise of the season.

**Week 1: Hope**

**Day 1:** **Introduction on Hope**

This week, we are going to focus on Hope. A topic that is so important to all of us and this time of year can bring about different feelings. As a kid, there is often excitement about what Christmas is going to bring. As we get older and experience more loss in life, this time of year can be a reminder of what (and who) is not here anymore. Through this week, take some time to think about where you have been placing your hope and maybe what you need to reevaluate.

So, let’s say you want to describe the feeling of anticipation of a future that’s better than the present. We call it hope. It is a state of anticipation and it’s crucial for healthy human existence and it is an important concept in the Bible. Biblical hope is based on a person, which makes it different from optimism. Optimism is about choosing to see, in any situation, how circumstances could work out for the best. But Biblical hope isn’t focused on circumstances. God’s past faithfulness motivates hope for the future. The earliest followers of Jesus had a similar habit of hope. They believed that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection was God’s surprising response to our slavery to evil, sin and death. The empty tomb opened up a new door of hope. The apostle Peter said that Jesus’ resurrection opened up a “living hope'' that people can be reborn to become new and different kinds of humans (1 Peter 1:3). Christian hope is bold - waiting for humanity and the whole universe to be rescued from evil and death. This hope isn’t optimism based on the odds but a choice to wait for God to bring about a future that’s as surprising as a crucified man rising from the dead. Christ-followers’ hope looks back to the risen Jesus in order to look forward with hope. (*From the Bible Project*)

**Read**: Romans 8:24-25; 15:13

Questions to consider:

* What have you been putting your hope in this holiday season?
* Have you asked the God of hope, through the Holy Spirit, to fill you with joy and peace so you can overflow?
* What can you do today to keep your hope rooted in God?
* Who can you share the God of hope with today?

**Day 2:** *Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem* (1868)

**Carol Background:**

“It was the sight of Bethlehem itself, one feels very sure, that gave Phillips Brooks the impulse to write this hymn. He was then rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity, in Philadelphia, and had spent a year’s vacation traveling in Europe and the East. “After an early dinner, we took our horses and rode to Bethlehem. It was only about two hours when we came to the town, situated on an eastern ridge of a range of hills, surrounded by its terraced gardens. It is a good-looking town, better built than any other we have seen in Palestine. . . . Before dark, we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the star. It is a fenced piece of ground with a cave in it (all the Holy Places are caves here), in which, strangely enough, they put the shepherds. The story is absurd, but somewhere in those fields we rode through where the shepherds must have been. As we passed, shepherds were still ‘keeping watch over their flocks’ or leading them home to fold.” Mr. Brooks returned in September 1866, and it must have been while meditating at home over what he had seen that the carol took shape in his mind.” *Louis F. Benson*

This is a well-known Christmas Carol that also brings about some very important truths from the first Christmas story. Today, take some time to read a few verses of the carol, a devotional thought and the background of the carol.

Verse 1:

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

Verse 5:

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel

**Read:** Micah 5:2

The name Bethlehem in this passage would have made the readers recall the days of Jesse, King David’s father (1 Sam. 17:12). This town most likely makes you think about Jesus’ birthplace. The ancient town of Bethlehem was small and at the time seemed insignificant. The prophet Micah gives hope that even through David’s decadent line, the Messiah will come from David’s town of Bethlehem. This carol reminds us of the hope that comes as we celebrate our Lord Emmanuel’s coming. This verse has given hope to many people over the years that even what the world sees as insignificant, God can use to bring about great things. What does God want to do in your life in the year to come?

**Day 3:** *Once Upon*

**Carol Background:**

 The music and words of this carol were written by Nathan Stiff and Lacy Hudson (2020 Sovereign Grace Worship).

Today we are going to look at a relatively new Christmas carol by a group called Sovereign Grace. If you have not heard this song yet, take some time and Google it and take a listen. This may be a song you want to add to your Christmas playlist this season. Songs have a powerful way of reminding us of Truth. Take some time to reflect on some of the words of this song, then read the Bible passage below and a devotional thought.

Verse 1
Once upon a midnight clear
Heaven’s song broke through the air
Peace and goodwill toward men
Born now in Bethlehem

Verse 2
Once upon a bed of straw
Slept the Sovereign Son of God
Lord of the universe
Breathing the dust of earth

Verse 3
Once upon a splintered cross
Jesus died to rescue us
All of our shame and sin
Nailed to the tree with Him

**Read**: 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

 The God who reconciled the world to Himself through the death and resurrection of the Son, now actually appeals to the world, through His ambassadors, to be reconciled to Him. That is the mission of Christ-followers - to tell the good news to others and show what it means to be God’s children. In verse 3, “Once Upon" connects with 2 Corinthians 2:21 well in the fact that Jesus dying on the cross took our shame and sin and rescued us. The one who knew no shame took our sin so that we can have a relationship with Him. Take some time today and reflect on that truth and thank the God of the universe for coming to earth to be with us and rescue us.

**Day 4:** *The First Noel*

**Carol Background:**

“The First Noel” is a traditional English Christmas carol with Cornish origins. It is thought to have originated from one of the Miracle Plays of the 13th or 14th century. These plays portrayed famous Bible stories, and the story of Jesus’ birth would have been amongst the most popular. Citizens of Cornwall would sing the carol in streets outside of churches, and the unique and beautiful song would latch onto all who heard it, its melody bringing joy, its lyrics bringing hope. Its current form was first published in *Carols Ancient and Modern* in 1823 and credited to William Sandys.

Today as we continue to look at different Christmas Carols that bring us hope, we are going to look at a well-known one. The word, “Noel” has multiple root meanings. The French word*, nouvelles*, means, “news”. The English root of the word comes from the word, *nowel*, which means “shout of joy.” This can be seen in the famous line "The first Noel the angels did say, Was to certain poor shepherds..." meaning good "news". The mother of Romance languages, Latin, also ushers forth a root in the word, *natalis*, meaning,” birth.” The more accurate meaning of Noel is tied to the early 4th century records of *Christus natus* celebrated on December 25th which was referred to as "today Christ is born" (crosswalk.com). The word Noel is not in the Bible but has become a main stay in our Christmas language

Then did they know assuredly
Within that house the King did lie:
One entered in then for to see,
And found the Babe in poverty:
Noel Noel Noel Noel!

Born is the King of Israel!
Then entered in those wise men three
Full reverently upon their knee,
And offered there in His presence
Their gold, and myrrh and frankincense.
Noel Noel Noel Noel!
Born is the King of Israel!

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

**Read:** Matthew 2:1-12

We don’t know how many wise men came to visit Jesus for sure. We know that the magi didn’t come to the manger but to a house to worship Jesus. This King they came to worship they found in poverty which is just like God to bring in His Kingdom to earth through a back hill place to an unlikely family and bring people from far away to worship Him. Take some time to reflect on the birth of our King and how it has changed your life.

**Day 5**: *Mary, Did You Know?*

**Carol Background:**

“Mary, Did You Know?” was written by Mark Lowry in 1984 with the music written by Buddy Greene in 1991. Lowry said, “I just tried to put into words the unfathomable. I started thinking of the questions I would have for her if I were to sit down and have coffee with Mary. You know, “What was it like raising God?” “What did you know?” “What didn’t you know?” None of the questions are answered in the song. Instead, the lyrics poetically invite the listener to contemplate the relationship between Mary and her newborn divine son, even if her faith and awareness did not yet include the details of what would unfold.”

In our last day of looking at hope we are going to look at the song “Mary Did You Know?” which makes you think about what a wonder it must have been to be the earthly mother of Jesus.

Mary did you know that your baby boy will some day walk on water?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you.

Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
And when your kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God.

Oh, Mary did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak, the praises of the lamb.

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.

**Read:** Luke 1:26-31

Mary knew that she had found favor with God. Catholics and Protestants disagree about the Immaculate Conception, or Mary’s sinlessness, but both agree that Mary was special, chosen, and blessed. Mary knew that she would bear a son who would be named Jesus, meaning Savior. She would give birth to a son, and was to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Mary knew Jesus was the Son of God, the Son of the Most High. Mary knew that Jesus was from the kingly line of His ancestor David and that God would give Him David’s throne, an eternal kingdom that will never end. Mary, more than anyone, knew that her pregnancy was a result of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High. Yes, she did, but that does not and should not ruin this beautiful Christmas song. The questions are rhetorical and could easily be answered with a “yes.” Even when we know the Biblical answers, we still ponder the questions, and it’s a good exercise to do so. Regardless of how much Mary did or did not perfectly understand, we can be sure the young Jewish girl asked many questions of God, the Father as she cradled God, the Son. “How is that even possible?” may have been one of many great questions.

**Week 2: Peace**

**Day 1:** **Introduction on Peace**

This week we are going to be looking at peace. The word peace is common in most languages. When people talk about “peace treaties” or “times of peace,” it means the absence of war. In the Bible, the word peace can refer to the absence of conflict, but it also points to the presence of something better in its place. The Hebrew word used in the Bible for peace is *shalom* which basically means complete or whole. *Shalom* refers to something that’s complex with lots of pieces that’s in a state of completeness, wholeness or restoration.

The angels announced Jesus’ birth to the shepherds in Luke 2:14 as peace coming to earth. In the verse you are going to read today Jesus says He came to offer His peace to His followers. The apostles claimed that Jesus made peace between messed up humans and God when He died and resurrected. Jesus restored to wholeness the broken relationship between humans and their Creator. Jesus is the whole complete human that we were made to be but have failed to be, and now He gives us His life as a gift. Jesus’ followers are now called to create peace. Paul instructed local churches to keep their unity through the bonds of peace, which requires humility and patience and bearing with others in love (Eph. 4:3).

Peace takes a lot of work because it’s not just the absence of conflict. True peace requires taking what’s broken and restoring it to wholeness, whether it’s in our lives, our relationships or in our world. That’s the real Biblical concept of peace. (*From the Bible Project*)

**Read**: John 14:27

1. How would you rate the peace in your life this Christmas season?
2. How can we tell if we are in the peace of Christ or relying on the counterfeit peace of the world?
3. How can we maintain the peace of Christ in our lives?

Should our life circumstances be a factor in our ability to abide in His peace?

Read and meditate on: Colossians 3:15, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7, Psalm 55:22, and Isaiah 26:3

**Day 2:** *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*

**Carol Background:**

This traditional English carol dates to the 1650’s. The earliest printed edition is dated 1760. The carol is referred to in Charles Dickens' 1843 novella A Christmas Carol and is quoted in George Eliot’s 1861 novel, Silas Marner. Some versions give the pronoun “ye” in the first line instead of “you,” but that is grammatically incorrect as “ye” is a subjective, not an objective pronoun.

We continue our look at peace as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The historic meaning of the phrase "God rest you merry" is “may God grant you peace and happiness.”

Verse 1:

 “God rest you merry gentlemen

Let nothing you dismay

Remember Christ our Savior

Was born on Christmas Day

To save us all from Satan's pow'r

When we were gone astray

Oh tidings of comfort and joy

Comfort and joy

Oh tidings of comfort and joy”

Verse 2:

“From God our Heavenly Father

A blessed Angel came;

And unto certain Shepherds

Brought tidings of the same:

How that in Bethlehem was born

The Son of God by Name.

O tidings of comfort and joy,

Comfort and joy

O tidings of comfort and joy”

Verse 4:

 "Fear not," then said the angel,

"Let nothing you affright;

this day is born a Savior

of a pure virgin bright,

to free all those who trust in Him

from Satan's pow'r and might.

O tidings of comfort and joy

Comfort of joy

O tidings of comfort and joy”

**Read:** Matthew 11:28-29

The old English in this song can make us miss what was originally intended. “To rest someone merry” meant “to keep someone happy.” In other words, this wasn’t a wish for happy people to rest but for people to be and to keep on being happy because Christ is born. The carol then goes on to state the reason for our continual joy and peace is the purpose for which Jesus came - to remember ‘Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.’ Rest in Him this Christmas season to find true peace.

**Day 3:** *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*

**Carol Background:**

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” is a Christmas carol based on the 1863 poem “Christmas Bells” written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The song tells of the narrator hearing Christmas bells during the American Civil War but despairing that “hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.’ After much anguish and despondency, the carol concludes with the bells ringing out with resolution that “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep” and that there will ultimately be ”... peace on earth, good will to men.”

Today we going to look at the song “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” that doesn’t tell the original story of Christmas but is more about what the birth of Jesus meant and continues to mean. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote this song while he was in a personal dark place. His wife died when her dress caught on fire. Then two years later his son left and signed up to serve in the Union Army in the Civil War. He took hope and found peace in the bells on Christmas day.

Verse 1:

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.

Verse 2:

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!"

That could be said of our day as well.

Verse 3:

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!"

**Read:** John 1:1-5

Consider the Christmas message of hope and peace for though the world lies in darkness, He who is the Life of the world has come and neither the world, nor Satan, nor the darkness can overpower the work of God in Christ. “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep.”

**Day 4:** *O Holy Night*

**Carol Background:**

“O Holy Night” is based on a French poem by poet Placide Cappeau written in 1843 to celebrate the renovation of the parish’s church organ. It was set to music in 1847 by Adolphe Adam. The song was adapted into English in 1855 by John Dwight. It became popular with abolitionists in the United States with the third verse stating, “Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, And in His name all oppression shall cease.”

We are going to look at another well-known carol today that you have probably heard many different artists sing. This carol reminds us that no matter what plans we have for the holidays we are reminded to look to the Lord in all circumstances and remember that He is the true reason for the season.

Verse 1:
O Holy night! The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Til He appears and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn
Fall on your knees; O hear the Angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born
O night, O Holy night, O night divine!

Verse 2:
Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming
Here come the Wise Men from Orient land

The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger
In all our trials born to be our friend
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend

Verse 3:
Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His Gospel is Peace
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother
And in His name, all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we
Let all within us Praise His Holy name
Christ is the Lord; O praise His name forever!
His power and glory evermore proclaim
His power and glory evermore proclaim

**Read:** Matthew 4:13-17

 You might be wondering what the passage you just read has to do with Christmas or “O Holy Night.” Jesus is starting His earthly ministry and begins by quoting from Isaiah 9 which is a prophecy about the Messiah coming and bringing light into this dark world. Jesus is claiming that prophecies are being fulfilled in Him. Then He calls the people to “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This passage of Scripture along with this carol remind us of the hope and peace of Jesus coming to earth to establish His Kingdom. Take some time to thank Jesus for the prophecies He fulfilled and how He still wants to use you today.

**Day 5:** Handel’s Messiah: *For Unto Us*

**Background:**

“For Unto Us” closes the third scene in Handel’s *Messiah* and it tells the news of the birth of a son. It is taken from Isaiah 9:6. Handel completed this 260-page oratorio in just 24 days during the summer of 1741. The scriptural text was compiled by Charles Jennens. The first performance of *Messiah* was on April 13, 1742, to celebrate Easter.

Isaiah 9:6 – “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 Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

This verse is repeated over and over in this song. There is much truth in this passage. Let’s look at each name together.

Wonderful: wonder, unusual, miracle, an astounding thing which causes a feeling or attitude of intense amazement

Counselor: Adviser; one who speaks and urges certain directions of action or thought, implying the advice is considered wise and valuable

Mighty God in the Hebrew is “El Gibbor”: Powerful; the ability to do things by virtue of strength, skill, resources, or authorization

Everlasting Father: Everlasting in the Hebrew means Forever, Eternal, for ever and ever, continual, always, an unlimited duration of time, without reference to other points or units of time. Father here is God Himself as a benevolent protector who takes care of His family.

Prince of Peace: Jesus is our leader who brings completeness and wholeness. Peace is something we all want in our lives. If we are honest as we look around the world, news, and social media, we don’t see a lot of peace. If we are honest if we look inside of ourselves, we don’t see a lot of peace. We see anxiety, anger, and bitterness.

Take some time to reflect the truth these names tell us about Jesus. How does this affect your week?

Read: Isaiah 9:1-7

**Week 3: Joy**

**Day 1: Introduction on Joy**

Being in a good mood is really great, and most languages have lots of words to describe the experience like happiness, cheerfulness, joyfulness, and so on. The same goes for the original languages in the Bible. Each word has its own unique nuances, but they all basically refer to the feeling of joy and happiness. What makes these Biblical joy words interesting is noticing the kinds of things that bring happiness and also seeing how joy is a key theme that runs through the whole story of the Bible.

On page one of the Bible, God says this world, His creation, is “very good.” Naturally, people find joy in the beautiful and good things of life. However, human history isn’t just a Joy fest. The Biblical story shows how we live in a world that’s been corrupted by our own selfishness. It’s marked by death and loss, and this is where Biblical faith offers a unique perspective on joy. It’s an attitude God’s people adopt not because of happy circumstances but because of their hope in God’s love and promise. For example, when the Israelites were suffering from slavery in Egypt, God raised up Moses to lead them into freedom, and the first thing the Israelites did was sing for joy even though they were in the middle of a dessert. They were vulnerable; the promised land was still far away; but they rejoiced anyway. This joy in the wilderness was a defining moment, a way of saying that the joy of God’s people is not determined by their struggles but by their future destiny.

This is why it’s significant that when Jesus of Nazareth was born it was announced as “good news that brings great joy” (Luke 2:10). He taught His followers the same joy that the Israelites had in the wilderness saying, “When people reject and persecute you for following me, rejoice, be very glad because your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12). After Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned His followers to go out and announce the good news that He was the risen King of the world. As they did so, the early Christians communities were known for being full of joy, even when they were persecuted

(Acts 5:41). When you believe that Jesus’ love has overcome death itself, joy becomes possible even in the darkest of circumstances.

This doesn’t mean you ignore or suppress your sorrow. This joy is different from the trite advice to “turn that frown upside-down.” Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus’ own life and love. That's what Biblical joy is all about. *(From the Bible Project)*

**Read:** Philippians 4:4

1. What can you do this Christmas season to remember the joy that Jesus came into this world to bring?
2. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord?

Why do you think he specifies “always”?

Describe how it might be possible to do this even in hard times.

**Day 2:** *Joy to the World*

**Carol Background**

“Joy to the World” was written in 1719 by Isaac Watts as a paraphrase of Psalm 98. He published it in his *Psalms of David Imitated* (1719) under the heading “The Messiah’s Coming and Kingdom.” Watts interpreted the Psalm through New Testament eyes speaking of Christ’s blessings extending victoriously over the realm of sin. Christ brings “joy to the world,” a light where there is darkness, and growth where there is decay. Surprisingly, this hymn was not written for Christmas.

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room”

While this song was not directly written for Christmas as it discusses Jesus’ rule over earth as king, we can still reflect on it at Christmas because firstly it is a song that is often played around Christmas time, so we associate it with Christmas. Above, there are just a few lyrics from this song that we can specifically reflect upon. I believe that there is no better song to begin our week of joy with than *Joy to the World.* As we celebrate Christmas, we often hear that this is the time of year to have joy. Why? Why is this the time of year to have joy? I am sure we could come up with many answers. Some may say joy comes from the gifts we receive, the 2 or 3 weeks you get off from school, winter weather with lots of snow, etc. There are many different answers we can give as to why we should have joy. As followers of Jesus, though, we can find the answer to why we should be joy-filled - not just at Christmas but all the time. We can know our Joy is found in the God who came, lived a perfect life, died, rose again, and now reigns over both heaven and earth. The coming of Christ as a baby is to be a celebration filled with

joy because we know how the story ends and that Jesus is the king who made a way for us as this song points out to the listener.

**Read:** Psalm 98

**Day 3:** *Emmanuel (Glory in The Highest)*

**Carol Background**

“Emmanuel (Glory in the Highest)” is another recent song by the Sovereign Grace group. It was first released on Oct. 23, 2020, and was written by Nathan Stiff.

Living in this world at times is a daunting and daring task, right? We can all agree on that - all we have to do is look at the news or get on our phones and we can see the brokenness and darkness of this world. This can leave us wondering where our joy comes from as we live in a broken world. Let's take a look at some of the lyrics of this song:

“The Light of Life descended to the world He made
The ageless Rock of Ages in a manger laid
Behold the Word that bore our flesh

The heart of God inside an infant’s chest…”

“Emmanuel, glory in the highest
Emmanuel, heaven here beside us
God Himself, with us now to dwell
Emmanuel!...”

This song is rooted in John 1:9-10 along with a few other passages throughout Scripture. This song and passage both describe Jesus (The Light of Life) who descended into this world. Jesus is the true light that came to earth and is the one who enlightens our hearts. This is the reason we can have hope and we can have joy because the King of the universe came into a sinful world as a baby to be with us. The name Emmanuel means “God with us.” So, as we head into this season, remind yourself of the God who came to be with you and let your joy be rooted in Emmanuel.

**Read:** John 1:9-10

**Day 4:** *Angels We Have Heard on High*

**Carol Background**

*Angels We Have Heard on High* is a French song believed to date from the 18th century with the first known publication in 1842. James Chadwick translated the song into English in 1862. It is traditionally sung to the hymn tune, “Gloria,” arranged by Edward Shippen Barnes.

As we know, joy can be shown in many different ways. It can be shown through actions, words, attitude, etc. *Angels We Have Heard on High* shows us the joy that the angels had as they sang about the birth of Christ.

“Angels we have heard on high

Sweetly singing o'er the plain

And the mountains in reply

Echoing their joyous strain

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!...”

As you read the lyrics of this song, you can sense the joy that angels had for the birth of Christ. We read just from these first few lyrics of the “joyous strain” the angels sang out “Glory to God in the highest.” Sometimes, we can become complacent when it comes to Christmas or overwhelmed by the holiday. It can become an event that we have heard about and read about so many times that we forget to take time and reflect on what a joyous time it is to celebrate the birth of our Savior. As we look toward Christmas, let us look toward it with joy as we speak and sing about the coming of Jesus Christ.

**Read:** Luke 2:13-14

**Day 5:** *Manger Throne*

**Carol Background**

The song, *Manger Throne*, was written by Jonathan Smith, Phil Wickham, and Tony Wood. It was released by Phil Wickham on Oct. 13, 2023. Speaking on the song he says:

“More than a Christmas song, this is a worship song. Every Christmas season, when I take the time to think on it, I am amazed in a greater way of the moment when Creator stepped into creation. God in human flesh. Heaven walking on earth. Everything about how Jesus came was different than what we would have expected, and also far better. He met us right in our humanity. Our dirt. Our mess. That’s what my new song *Manger Throne* is all about.”

“You could have stepped into creation

With fire for all to see

Brought every tribe and nation to their knees

Arriving with the host of heaven

In royal robe and crown

The rulers of the earth all bowing down

But You chose meekness over majesty

Wrapped Your power in humanity

Glory be to You alone

King who reigns from a manger throne

My life, my praise, everything I own

To Jesus the King on a manger throne…”

Along with Phil Wickham the author of this song, we each year should grow in amazement as we continue to know Christ more. He stepped into His creation not because of any obligation but because He still loved us even in our mess. When we take a moment to think about the reality of Christmas and the birth of Christ and that our Holy God was willing to become human and face the punishment that we deserved so

that He could have a relationship with you and I, it should fill us with gratitude and joyfulness.

**Read:** Philippians 2:5-11

**Week 4: Love**

**Day 1: Introduction on Love**

Love is a word that has been become unclear in English because you can love your mom and you can love pizza. If the word love means the same thing in both of these cases your mom’s going to feel really bad. One time Jesus was asked about the most important command in the Jewish Scriptures. He first quoted from the ancient prayer in the Torah called the Shema. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deut. 6:5). So, love for God is the most important thing, but then Jesus quickly followed up, saying another command from the Torah was also the most important which is to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18). To ask the question which one of these is more important is to miss His point. For Jesus, they are two sides of the same coin. Your love for God will be expressed by your love for people and vice versa. When Jesus uses love, it is not primarily a feeling for someone like “I fell in love,” but for Jesus, love is an action. It’s a choice that you make to seek the well-being of people other than yourself. This means that genuine love for God and others means seeking people’s well-being without expecting anything in return, especially from people who are in difficult situations who can’t repay you even if they wanted to. This kind of generous love reflects the very heartbeat of God. Jesus took it a step further to say authentic love is how you treat the person you can’t stand (Luke 6:35). This kind of enemy-embracing love imitates the very character of God Himself.

Jesus was constantly helping and serving the people around Him in very practical and tangible ways. He consistently moved towards poor and hurting people who couldn’t benefit Him in return. He showed love for the forgotten ones, the people who usually fell through the cracks. Christian faith involves trusting that at the center of the universe is a being overflowing with love for His world which means that the purpose of human existence is to receive this love that has come to us in Jesus and then to give it back to others. *(From the Bible Project)*

**Read:** 1 John 4:9-11

1. How does our culture define love? What does that love look like?
2. How is the way the culture defines love different from how we see God’s sacrificial love in this passage?
3. How can you show sacrificial love to someone in your life this week?

**Day 2:** *O Come All You Unfaithful*

**Carol Background**

Sovereign Grace released O Come All You Unfaithful on October 9, 2020. It was written by Bob Kauflin and Lisa Clow. It is found on the album Heaven Has Come.

Many of us can think of a love story if asked to like Romeo & Juliet or for the younger generation like Anna and Kristoff from Frozen. We can all think of a love story whether it is a real life one or from a movie. When discussing love stories let us not forget the greatest love story ever between Christ and His church. Let’s take a moment and read some of the lyrics from this song:

“O come, all you unfaithful

Come, weak and unstable

Come, know you are not alone…”

“He’s the Lamb who was given
Slain for our pardon
His promise is peace
For those who believe
So come, though you have nothing
Come, He is the offering
Come, see what your God has done”

The song begins by calling those who are unfaithful, so immediately we are able to relate with the song because at some point in our lives we have been unfaithful to God in some way. The song continues on to call us who are broken to come and see what God has done for us. The song ends by saying that “He’s (Christ) the Lamb who was given Slain for our

pardon.” Jesus is the Lamb who was slain for us and that in itself shows His great love for us. But looking deeper, we were His special creation that rebelled against and were unfaithful to Him - we were broken, yet He still came for you and me. That love is an unfathomable love.

**Read:** Matthew 12:18-20 & Romans 5:8

**Day 3:** *The Little Drummer Boy*

**Carol Background**

Written in 1941 by Katherine Davis, *The Little Drummer Boy* was first recorded by the Trapp Family. The song was originally titled “Carol of the Drum.”

When we think of the song *The Little Drummer Boy* it may be easy to get caught up in the rhythm of the song and the “pa rum pum pum pum,” but if we are to listen to the words or read the lyrics of this song we would maybe come to a deeper understanding of God’s love for us.

Come they told me, pa rum pum pum pum
A new born King to see, pa rum pum pum pum
Our finest gifts we bring, pa rum pum pum pum
To lay before the King, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,

So to honor Him, pa rum pum pum pum,
When we come.

Baby Jesu, pa rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too, pa rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring, pa rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give the King, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,

Shall I play for you, pa rum pum pum pum,
On my drum?

Mary nodded, pa rum pum pum pum
The ox and lamb kept time, pa rum pum pum pum
I played my drum for Him, pa rum pum pum pum
I played my best for Him, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,

Then He smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum.

After reading these lyrics, we come to a Biblical truth that is presented in this song - there is no gift that you can give or offer that is worthy for Jesus. While that is true, there is also no thing that we need to give Jesus to make Him love us because He gives His love to us freely by His own sacrifice. Reflect on the passage below and remind yourself as you go throughout this season that wealth and expensive gifts are not what we should worry about, but rather focus on the meaning and love behind the gifts

**Read:** Luke 21:1-4

**Day 4:** *Away in a Manger*

**Carol Background**

*Away in the Manger* was written in the late 19th century and is one of our most popular Christmas carols. The music was written by William Kirkpatrick, but the author of the words is debated. It was long attributed to Martin Luther but is now thought to be American in origin.

When reflecting upon the Christmas story, I often find myself being in awe of the fact that Jesus could have really come in any way He wanted to, yet He came as a baby in a manger whom they had no room for at the inn. This old Christmas carol, *Away in the Manger,* describes to us baby Jesus as He lays in a manger. Then the song changes its tone to ask “Lord Jesus” to look over all children and make us fit to live in heaven with Him.

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay
The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle 'til morning is nigh

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care
And fit us for heaven to live with Thee there

This song should be a reminder that while Jesus was never not fully God, He also took on the form of being fully human so that we could know Him and relate with Him. Now we can ask Him for guidance and protection as we go throughout our lives.

**Read:** Hebrews 2:17

Reflect on this verse as we continue to focus on the love of Jesus as He came in human form to save us and make a way for us to have eternal life with Him.

**Day 5:** *Noel*

**Carol Background**

Written by Lauren Daigle and Chris Tomlin, *Noel* is a powerful reminder of God’s incredible love and sacrifice demonstrated by the sending of His Son to be born as a humble child in a manger. The song’s lyrics and message align closely with the Biblical narrative of Jesus’ birth.

As we wrap up our final day, we are reminded of Jesus and the love that He has for His people. This song, like many of the songs we have discussed over these 4 weeks, can cover multiple themes. In this song specifically we see hope, hope that Jesus has brought by coming to earth. We can find peace in Jesus’ love for us along with the Joy that comes from knowing Jesus and His love for us. One of the lines in this song says, “The story of amazing love.” The story of Christmas is one that should be recognized as exactly that, “The story of amazing love”.

Love incarnate, love divine

Star and angels gave the sign

Bow to babe on bended knee

The Savior of humanity

Unto us a Child is born

He shall reign forevermore

Noel, Noel

Come and see what God has done

Noel, Noel

The story of amazing love!

The light of the world, given for us

Noel

Son of God and Son of man

There before the world began

Born to suffer, born to save

Born to raise us from the grave

Christ the everlasting Lord

He shall reign forevermore

If we reflect on this more, we come to an understanding that Jesus came as the light of the world so that we could see Him clearly as our Savior. He also came so that we could be more like Him. So as you reflect on a few passages and this song, pray that firstly you would see Jesus for who He is, “the Light of the world,” and secondly how you can reflect that light to those around you.

**Read:** John 8:12 & Matthew 5:14