

# Advent Devotional

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2017

**December 3 - December 24**

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**Village Church**  
FOLLOWING JESUS FOR LIFE

**December 3, 2017**  
**First Sunday of Advent**

**The First Noel**  
Michael Dyer

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel;  
Born is the King of Israel!*

I grew up in an era when Christian displays could occur on city public property. An important family Christmas tradition in my hometown of Nashville, Tennessee, was to see the nativity scene exhibit in Centennial Park. This nativity scene, which first appeared in 1953, was an elaborate exhibit commissioned by the Harvey's Department Store. It drew thousands of visitors from Tennessee and Kentucky during the Christmas season. Christmas carols played in the park and an elaborate light show continuously illuminated the characters throughout the evening.

I particularly recall the connection I made between the exhibit and the hymn, *The First Noel*. Both addressed Jesus's wondrous appeal to shepherds (members of the least admired occupations in Biblical times) and the Magi (members of Persia's "intelligentsia"). Jesus's coming was first proclaimed to "the least" yet was also acknowledged by those of great privilege. The Magi endured a long arduous journey to witness his birth and bring gift offerings. The exhibit, hymn and the myriad of people who witnessed the exhibit reinforced my belief that God, through Jesus Christ, is available to all of us, regardless of our heritage, occupation or circumstances. Sometimes Jesus appears spontaneously and dramatically (shepherds heralded by the heavenly hosts or "born again moments"), other times after a lengthy personal journey (Magi). Regardless, we simply need to be open to his presence in our lives and he can enter. Time, weather-related decay and social/political mores eliminated the Nativity exhibit in Nashville in 1967. Jesus, though, is always with us, as is the memory of the Nashville nativity for those of us blessed to have experienced it. For your own visual experience of the Nashville Nativity you can view this video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsPSd3\\_WvqQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsPSd3_WvqQ)

*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,  
because he will save his people from their sins. [Matthew 1:21]*



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 4, 2017**

**Stille Nacht (Silent Night)**

Margaret Weigand

This was written by Charles Weigand and is submitted in his memory

*Silent Night, Holy Night  
All is calm, All is bright*

*Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!* -- beautifully sung in perfect German by Catherine Meinen to the overflowing, standing room only crowd in the sanctuary on Christmas Eve brought tears to my eyes.

The last time that I heard this sung in German was Christmas Eve 1945 – 69 years ago. It was during an impromptu Midnight Mass in a small unheated church with a capacity of maybe 150 on the desolate moors and peat bogs of extreme north-western Germany. The area was abutted by the North Sea and the Dutch border; an area of about 700,000 acres which had become a massive POW camp. Tens of thousands of German POWs were housed in schools, barns, and tents.

There was, of course, no transportation – everybody walked, some as long as two hours. There was little snow, but it was cold. In the field opposite the Church stood an old JU 88 night fighter, possibly landed there around war's end – perhaps the pilot had family in the area.

By the time it came to sing *Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!*, there must have been several thousand men outside who had made the trek to the church. When it was over, these men quietly made their way back to their abodes, many with tears in their eyes.

***“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.” [Jeremiah 23:5-6]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 5, 2017**

## **Away in a Manger**

Betty Brown Simm

*Away in a manger no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head*

A ravaging California wildfire burned our house. Everything destroyed. My husband, children and I fled from the flames that consumed clothes, toys and all precious mementos of family life. We had nothing and no place to lay our heads. Losing all of our possessions and almost our lives was devastating, and shock shattered our self-esteem. Where would we go? What would we do? My family huddled with other confused refugees in a temporary hotel lobby.

*Away in a Manger* is a Christmas carol that reminds me that Jesus entered God's earthly world with no home and a donkey's feed trough for his bed. That Christmas song brings back unforgettable memories of a time when my family faced the same lack of safety and home.

A sudden sense of peace dissolved my despair. From memory had come a Bible message. "Do not lose heart. For we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal. Though your earthly home be destroyed, you have a house from God, not built by human hands, eternal in the heavens." Like "little Lord Jesus" we had no place to lay our heads but I was strengthened by God's unseen Holy Spirit. From Bible study I knew Jesus's humble beginning in a stable and had accepted his God-given life of love, service and sacrificial death to remove my sins. The destructive fire experience gave me a long-lasting connection to Jesus through a mutual experience. It was humbling and touched my soul with faith in God's comfort through any adversity. *Away in a Manger* is a hymn that reminds me God provides everything: peace in my mind; love in my heart from church friends with an earthly place to "lay our (weary) heads"; and God's promise for His eternal heavenly home.

***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. [John 14:27]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 6, 2017**

## **Joy to the World** History of the Carol

*Joy to the World, the Lord is come! Let Earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing*

The words and lyrics of the popular Christmas carol *Joy to the World* were written in 1719 by Isaac Watts (1674-1748). According to many accounts, Isaac Watts showed an aptitude for theology and language at a young age. He learned Latin at age 5, Greek at age 9, French at age 11 and Hebrew at age 13. When Isaac complained to his father that he felt church music was boring, his father challenged him to write something better. The eventual result was a revolution in church music. Watts became one of the most prolific writers of church music in church history.

In 1719 Isaac Watts published *Psalms of David* which included *Joy to the World*. The words are a paraphrase of Psalm 98:4-9. Watts interpreted this psalm as a celebration of Jesus's role as King of both his church and the whole world. The music of the carol is by George Frederick Handel (1685-1759).

***Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music;  
make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing,  
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—  
shout for joy before the LORD, the King. [Psalm 98:4-8]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

December 7, 2017

## In the Bleak Midwinter

Cynthia Soltero

*What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.*

Looking back, I remember cold winter nights as a small child. My Father worked tirelessly. Being of meager means, sometimes he would take on an extra shift. I shared a bed with my younger brother and sister. Some nights were filled with laughter and others fighting as we played tug of war with the blanket, struggling to stay warm. All through the year our Mother would read Bible stories to us before bed. We all looked forward to Christmas and hearing about the big bright star, all the wise men with their gifts and the birth of sweet Baby Jesus. My Dad and Mom both loved to sing and encouraged us to join the children's choir as soon as we were able. I remember my Father saying we don't have monetary gifts to share so we will give gifts from our heart, acts of service and the talents God has given us through our singing. Every Christmas Eve there was at least one family member singing at each of the four services. The last service was my favorite: I remember flickering candles, Mom and Dad sweetly singing and we children in our PJs. At the end of the service the congregation held hands and we all sang Silent Night. A feeling of complete peace and love filled the air.

Days before Christmas the Shriners dropped off a gift for each child, as well as a frozen turkey and some fixings. Christmas Day was like a Heavenly miracle. We arose to the savory aroma of many early hours of Dad basting the turkey. He was a wonderful cook and artist. When we awoke Dad had surprised us by painting a beautiful Christmas mural on the living room window with the manger that lay beneath. The nativity scene had everything: three wise men, all the animals, the little shepherd boy, an angel, Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. Before eating we told each other what we were grateful for and thanked God in prayer for his faithfulness and unfailing provision. Later we gathered by the painted tree. In that perfect moment, streams of brilliant light passed through the glass illuminating each branch, ornament and precious nativity scene. It was all so beautiful. We just looked at each other, our faces aglow with the rays of God's radiant smile. Our eyes were shining with the joy of knowing we had been touched by God, who lovingly watched over us. We took turns gratefully opening the gifts given to us by the Shriners. Dad played his guitar and we sang wonderful Christmas carols. To this day, hearing that song still warms my heart and soul. What childhood memories assure you of Christ's faithful love in your own life?

***On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.  
[Matthew 2:11]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

December 8, 2017

## O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Lyn Lloyd-Smith

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

The school Christmas play each year had an international theme. Carols and traditions from other countries were introduced to us as we sang strange words to haunting tunes, acted out our version of the Nativity and understood that children all over the world were celebrating the coming of the Baby Jesus just like us. And more, not only were we rejoicing with others worldwide, we were continuing the practices of two thousand years as our awkward infant voices wove around the Latin words of *Veni, Veni, Immanuel*. In my mind's eye, I saw the plainsong sung in the dim glow of firelight, in the silence of winter, in the cold stillness of ancient walls.

One year, in our festivities, I played the part of the Spirit of Christmas, country of origin unknown, dressed in lemon tulle and wearing a yellow cardboard and tinsel crown. It seemed a strange casting for the painfully shy, tomboyish child that I was. Somewhere there is a photo of me, flanked by shepherds in white star covered robes and, unaccountably, a boy in cowboy hat and boots. Was it that year that we discovered *Silent Night* was originally from the German *Stille Nacht*? Or was that the time we learned that *Il est né, le Divin Enfant* was how the French celebrated the arrival of the Christ Child? Perhaps that was when we sang the evocative words of the *Basque Carol*. "The Angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame," and my imagination soared above and around "the lowly maiden Mary."

The lemon tulle dress is long gone but the cardboard crown is still in a drawer at my parents' home. Sometimes I happen on it and as I pick up the old and faded cardboard, the tinsel catches the light like the candles of long ago and I hear again in the plainchant, the ancient and ever present longing for the advent of the Savior "*Oh come, oh come, Emmanuel* and ransom captive Israel..."

***"...and they will call him Emmanuel," which means "God with us." [Matthew 1:23]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 9, 2017**  
**It Came Upon a Midnight Clear**  
History of the Carol

*Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all gracious King!  
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.*

Reverend Edmund Hamilton Sears, a Unitarian minister, wrote a poem *The Angel's Song -- It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* in 1849 when recovering from illness and severe depression. The United States was in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War and the issue of slavery, which would ignite the Civil War in a decade, raged. There were revolutions throughout Europe and people all over the world were at war with each other. No one seemed to listen to the angel's song of peace. This was in contrast to Sears's profound faith in God and the belief that through the centuries God sends his emissary angels to earth with a resounding message of peace.

When Reverend Sears wrote *The Angel's Song* in 1849, carols were just beginning a 19<sup>th</sup> century revival as famous composers began to write new and contemporary versions of their ancient forms. *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* was one of the first of these new carols. In December, 1849, Reverend Dr. Morrison, editor of the *Christian Register*, first received the poem and liked it so well that he used it in several Christmas programs. He published it in his magazine in December, 1850. No one knows what tune the first singers used to perform the work in these early days. New York organist Richard Storrs Willis, who studied music with Felix Mendelssohn in Germany, didn't adapt the words of Reverend Sears to a tune that he wrote that he called *Carol*, until about a decade after Sears first published the poem. *Carol*, the tune that Richard Willis wrote, became the popular tune to sing *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*. In 1874, in England, composer Arthur Sullivan set the poem to a different tune that he called *Noel Carol*. *Carol* is the most popular tune used in the United States.

***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, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. [Luke 2:8-9]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 10, 2017**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**

## **O Come, Little Children**

Julie MacNeil

*O come, little children, O come one, and all,  
To Bethlehem haste, to the manger so small*

It was 1985. Christmas was approaching. I was a teacher but had no classroom. I was a singer but had no choir. I was a Christian but had no church home. What I did have were three children of my own and about 15 kids who lived on our street, Meadowview Drive. So I decided to gather the children together and teach them Christmas carols, so that we could go caroling on our block. I printed up words to the carols, made cookies, and invited the kids to come over to our house to practice once or twice a week. If they worked hard and learned the words, we would have cookies at the end of rehearsal. I had no clue how to conduct, but the kids didn't know that. I just waved my arms and they sang. We learned many songs such as *O Come All Ye Faithful*, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, and *Joy to the World*.

A few nights before Christmas, I made red ties for the boys and red bows for the girls. They put them on over their white shirts, and we went caroling. When we were finished, all the children and parents came back to our house, where the newly-created Meadowview Children's Choir put on a concert. They lined up on our staircase. We turned out the lights, all except for the Christmas tree. They held little pen lights under their chins, and in the soft glow, sang, "O Come Little Children, O Come One and All...o come to the manger in Bethlehem's stall"... They then processed into the living room and sang their hearts out, to thunderous applause!

Years later, when those children were grown, one of them told me that whenever she heard one of those carols, she remembered our Meadowview Children's Choir, where she had learned them. Whenever I hear *O Come, Little Children* I think of those sweet young faces, in the glow of the penlights, and hear their clear, childish voices. They gave me a classroom, a choir, and the spirit of Christmas.

***Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." [Matthew 19:14]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 11, 2017**

**We Three Kings**  
History of the Carol

*O Star of Wonder, Star of Night, Star with Royal Beauty bright,  
Westward leading, Still proceeding, Guide us to Thy perfect Light.*

*We Three Kings*, also known as *We Three Kings of Orient Are* or *The Quest of the Magi*, was written by John Henry Hopkins, Jr. in 1857. During his final year of teaching at the General Theological Seminary in New York City, Hopkins wrote the carol for a Christmas pageant held at the seminary. Originally titled *Three Kings of Orient*, it was sung within his circle of family and friends. Because of the popularity it achieved among them, Hopkins decided to publish the carol in 1862 in his book *Carols, Hymns and Songs*. It was the first Christmas carol originating from the United States to achieve widespread popularity, as well as the first to be featured in *Christmas Carols Old and New*, a collection of carols that was published in the United Kingdom. In 1916, the carol was printed in the hymnal for the Episcopal Church; which was the first year the hymnal had a separate section for Christmas songs. *We Three Kings* was also included in the *Oxford Book of Carols*, published in 1928, which praised the song as "one of the most successful of modern composed carols."

Hopkins encouraged the song's dramatic possibilities. Verses 2, 3, and 4 were encouraged to be sung as a solo by each king, with verses 1 and 5 to be sung as a trio. The *Oxford Book of Carols* (1964) not only encouraged this dramatic presentation of the carol, but its editor even provided an arrangement suitable for three voices and labeled them by the names Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.

***After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." [Matthew 2:1-2]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 12, 2017**

## **Do You Hear What I Hear?**

History of the Carol

*Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy  
Do you hear what I hear?  
Ringing thru the sky, shepherd boy  
Do you hear what I hear?*

*Do You Hear What I Hear?* was written in October 1962 and released in November of that year. Lyrics were written by Noel Regney and music by Gloria Shayne Baker, who were married. Regney had been invited by a record producer to write a Christmas song, but he was hesitant due to the commercialism of the Christmas holiday.

The couple wrote the song as a plea for peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Regney was inspired to write the lyrics, "Said the night wind to the little lamb, 'Do you see what I see?'" and "Pray for peace, people everywhere" after watching babies being pushed in strollers on the sidewalks of New York City. Shayne stated in an interview years later that neither she nor her husband could personally perform the entire song at the time they wrote it because of the emotions surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis. "Our little song broke us up. You must realize there was a threat of nuclear war at the time." The song went on to sell tens of millions of copies and has been covered by hundreds of artists.

***He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.  
Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be  
condemned. [Mark 16:15-16]***



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December 13, 2017

## The Hallelujah Chorus

Laura Metzger

*And He shall reign forever and ever,  
King of kings! and Lord of lords!*

I will admit upfront that I am a Christmas music lover. My family worries just how early the radio stations will begin playing the music - because I will be listening! It's terribly hard to pick a favorite tune. But, when I was in high school, around the beginning of November each year, our band got music for the Hallelujah Chorus. The playing of this music, with the band playing and the choir singing in full force, was a very big tradition at our annual Christmas concert. I played bass clarinet and my part in the Hallelujah Chorus was the bass part - I still sing that part when we have a group sing, as that's the part I know best!

Whenever this song is played today, it brings back a lot of memories. I think of old friends who live far away, many of whom I've had the pleasure of reconnecting with via social media and I think of a time that was a bit different than today. As high school students we were maybe a little more naive. Tradition was still considered a good thing, and no one seemed very offended by having religious songs at the school Christmas concert. Tradition is something that God sought His people to keep so that they would remember how He was at work in their lives. The many traditions of Christmas help us remember important stories of our faith that can build our own faith, as well as the faith of our families and friends. I hope this Christmas season you will continue to build traditions that are special to you and your family and friends.

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
[Isaiah 9:6]*



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**December 14, 2017**

## **Hark The Herald Angels Sing**

History of the Carol

*Mild He lays His glory by; Born that man no more may die.  
Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth.  
Hark the Herald Angels Sing; Glory to the newborn King*

The original hymn was composed as a *Hymn for Christmas-Day* by Charles Wesley and was included in his 1739 collection *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Wesley's original hymn began with the opening line "Hark how all the Welkin rings." This was changed to the familiar "Hark! the Herald Angels sing" by George Whitefield in his 1754 *Collection of Hymns for Social Worship*. A second change was made in the 1782 collection with the repetition of the opening line, "Hark! the Herald Angels sing/ Glory to the newborn king" at the end of each stanza, as it is commonly sung today.

In 1855, English musician William H. Cummings adapted Felix Mendelssohn's secular music from *Festgesang* to fit the lyrics of *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. Wesley envisaged the song being sung to the same tune as his Easter song *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* and in some hymnals that tune is included for the carol along with the more popular Mendelssohn-Cummings tune.

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope  
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. [1 Peter 1:3]***



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December 15, 2017

## To See a World in a Grain of Sand

Pat Grant

*To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower;  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour*

Each December, our sense of wonder is renewed when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior. It's a time, as the poet William Blake writes: "To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower; hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour."

When Mary held the infant Jesus in the palm of her hand, did she know she held infinity? And what did Joseph think?

We sometimes celebrate Christmas without giving a thought to Joseph. But what a wonderful man he must have been. After all, God chooses him above all others to stand in for him as father, to foster his Son Jesus – quite an honor, when you stop to think about it. God sends his angel to tell Joseph what to do and he does it. Mary becomes his wife and Jesus his eldest son. Because of the love and care with which Joseph raises him, Jesus grows to manhood, a sturdy thirty-year old who, after years spent in his father's carpentry shop, can walk miles from Galilee to Judea and back carrying out his other Father's business.

The Christmas story is not only Mary and the babe. God made a family – a father, a mother, a child. It couldn't have been an easy job, raising this boy. Like other fathers, before and after him, Joseph must have agonized over his worthiness to take care of this small, precious, new life.

A prayer for Joseph and all fathers: Dear heavenly Father, our Creator, remind us to nurture each child as you do, to love our human family as you do. Help us to remember Joseph this Christmas season, the one to whom you entrusted your Son.

***When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him  
and took Mary home as his wife. [Matthew 1:24]***



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December 16, 2017

## Mary, Did You Know?

Deirdre Smith

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?  
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will 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.*

When I awaken on a Sunday morning and glance at the clock, I quickly calculate how much of *CBS Sunday Morning* I have missed. A fascinating compilation of stories primarily about the performing arts, including music, dance, painting, art, and architecture, my DVR is stuffed with 88 recordings that I unrealistically aspire to watch, dating back to 2014.

One Sunday morning I managed to catch the story about London-headquartered Bellerby & Company Globemakers, whose custom, handmade globes are a work of art. A delicate and painstaking process, the globes are hand-painted and masterfully cut with precision and pasted onto the naked sphere in strips. The largest, the 50-inch *Churchill* globe, is worth \$80,000 and takes a year and two months to create.

As I watched the artists at work, in a startled flash, I wondered where the globe was that I had purchased for my daughter years ago. It was above and beyond the conventional globe of my youth. You could touch any country with a wand and it would tell you all about it—how many people live there, and what the capital city is. For a long time the globe has collected dust, victim of a dead battery, I imagine. I glanced to the right of the TV, and behold, there it was on the top of a filing cabinet. It had been in front of me all these months, and I didn't even realize it was there, like the sticky note you post to remember your lunch. Then, because you've seen it so many times, it is unimposing. It all but disappears.

An instant later I felt the Holy Spirit telling me, Child, the "invisible" globe is like me. People rush around and are lost in their busy schedules and they forget I am present. With their attention fixed on other things they fail to see that I am right there in their midst, desiring communion with them. Lord, help me not to lose sight of you. When I am consumed by the cares of this earthly world, let me hear you in prayer and your written Word. Like the skilled globe maker, you lovingly mold and design me, and because of this I am more precious than fine gold. (Isaiah 13:12) You know all the details of my life and my innermost being; I am "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalm 139:14). Lord, help me to remember you. You are "Lord of all creation," ruler of nations, "heaven's perfect Lamb," "the great I am."

***"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."  
Then the angel left her. [Luke 1:38]***



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**December 17, 2017**  
**Third Sunday of Advent**

**Away In a Manger**  
Amy E. Zajac

*I love Thee, Lord Jesus look down from the sky  
and stay by my side 'til morning is nigh*

As a child, at about eight years old, I started piano lessons. My teacher would give me a Christmas Carol to learn every year. As I advanced, after a couple years, *Away In a Manger* was assigned to me. I loved the song. I knew all the verses by heart, so I was happy to be learning the music. I didn't pass it that year. According to my teacher, I couldn't get an eighth note to the correct tempo. I laid it aside. My teacher assigned it to me the next four years, and for whatever reason, I couldn't get the tempo correct. It sounded right to me, but my teacher asked me to keep practicing and practicing. She never gave me the gold star I always received for a successfully learned song.

Over the years, it would come up in conversations and my family often teased me about it. I wrote a short story about it a few years ago and asked my writer's critique group to help me edit. One writer friend loved that I kept working on the same song for years, because she said it gave me stamina and the fortitude to persevere, even though I never passed. That Christmas she gave me a stunning ornament crafted so well, it had a music box and moving parts inside it...and yes, the music it played was *Away In a Manger*.

***But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No,  
I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.  
[1 Corinthians 15:10]***



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December 18, 2017

## Angels We Have Heard on High History of the Carol

*Angels we have heard on high; Sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply; echoing their joyous strains  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

*Angels We Have Heard On High* has a long history that may go back to the apostolic age. It reaches back to a time when Christmas was a holiday celebrated by monks in a very austere manner. "Gloria in excelsis Deo" means "Glory to God in the highest," a phrase that played an important part of worship at church masses dating back to 130 A.D. During that period, Pope Telesphorus issued a decree that on the day of the Lord's birth all churches should have special evening services. He also ordered that, at these masses, after the reading of certain Scripture or the conclusion of specific prayers, the congregation should always sing the words "Gloria in excelsis Deo." Historical church documents reveal that monks carried this executive order throughout the land and that by the third century it was a practice used by most churches at Christmas services.

The song originated as a traditional French carol as early as the eighteenth century and was published in North America in *Nouveau Recueil de Cantiques* (New Hymnal) for the Diocese of actually published. Several versions or translations of the text can be found, but they all stem from the same source and are inspired by Luke 2:6-20. It is a song of invitation from Christians to others to come celebrate Christ's birth with them.

***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." [Luke 2:13-14]***



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**December 19, 2017**

## **He Paid a Debt**

Jane Allison Austin

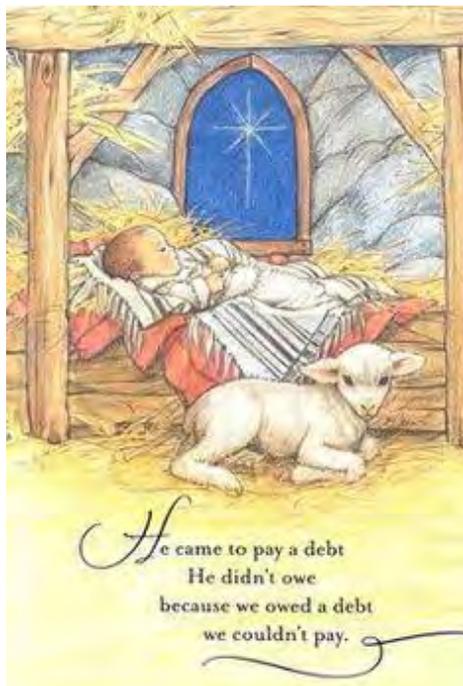
*He paid a debt He did not owe because  
I owed a debt I could not pay*

It's not a line from a Christmas song. I saw it first on a Christmas card I received years ago. I think of it at Easter, too, because Easter is what Christmas is all about. This year the words have taken on new meaning.

I had a debt I couldn't pay. It came out of a time in my life when things went topsy-turvy. I had been blessed in always knowing safety and comfort, but this period brought fear and chaos. The debt had helped me survive, but it bred a new form of anxiety: how would I ever pay it back. Then a friend stepped in and paid it. I thought she meant the payment would be a loan, that she would be a gentler creditor. "It's a gift," she said. "You can't pay the debt, but I can."

I am free this Christmas because of what my friend did for me. You and I are free this Christmas because of what Christ did for us by coming that holy night in Bethlehem and taking the first step toward the Cross.

***Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. [Romans 13:8]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 20, 2017**

**Still, Still, Still**  
History of the Carol

*Still, still, still, One can hear the falling snow.  
For all is hushed, The world is sleeping  
Holy Star its vigil keeping  
Still, still, still, One can hear the falling snow.*

The melody of *Still, Still, Still* is a traditional Austrian lullaby. The tune appeared for the first time in 1865 in a folksong collection of Maria Vinzenz Süß (1802–1868), founder of the Salzburg Museum. The words, which run to six verses in German, describe the peace of the infant Jesus and his mother as the baby is sung to sleep. They have changed slightly over the years but the modern Standard German version remains attributed to Georg Götsch (1895–1956). There are various English translations.

The music and its verses reflect the peacefulness of the manger where Mary cared for the infant Jesus. The lyrics also reflect the hope of salvation that has been brought to mankind through Jesus' birth. Stanza one paints the picture of the first Christmas night, with Mary holding the newborn babe in her arms, protecting him from the chill night air. Stanza two continues the Christmas story with the sleeping Jesus, guarded by angels and watched over by his mother. Stanza three's German is translated as "sleep, sleep, sleep, my dear babe, sleep."

***He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth." [Psalms 46:10]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 21, 2017**

## **O, Holy Night**

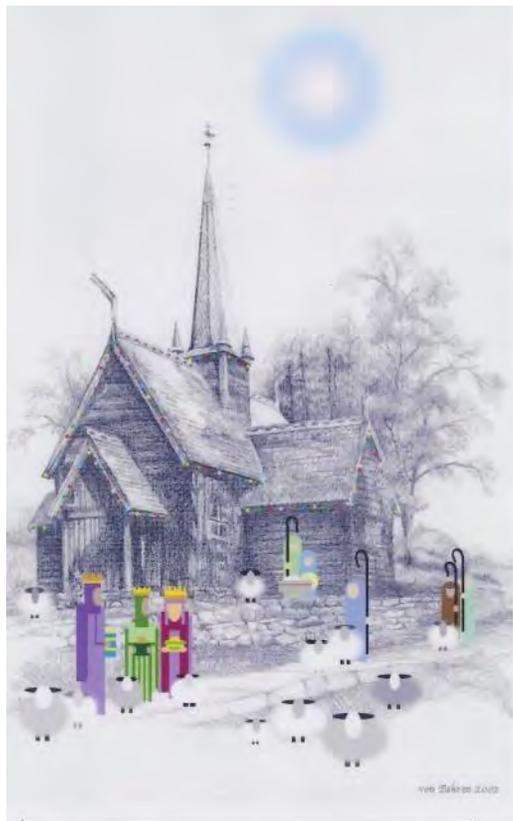
Ruth Grendell

*Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!*

Every year we look forward to receiving our very special Christmas card from our friends, David, a graphic artist, and his wife, Parma. During the year they travel with camera in hand in anticipation of finding the perfect background for the unique design portraying the Christmas story. Our favorite one is a snowy winter scene of a little country church in Europe surrounded by the superimposed nativity figures. We decided that this one needed to be framed and become part of our Christmas decorations.

When I unwrap the picture, and place it on the fireplace mantel each year, I reflect how it represents the many Christmas carols that I love. Of course, *Silent Night* is the first one that I “hear.” However, as the days progress toward Christmas, I like to sit at the piano and play, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, or *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, and others. This year, I believe I will start the season with another favorite, *O Holy Night*.

***He is a light to reveal GOD to the nations, and he is the Glory of your people Israel!***  
***[Luke 2:32]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 22, 2017**

## **Silent Night**

Myra Cullum

*“Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light...”*

It was my first year of teaching music in San Antonio, Texas. I was fresh out of college. I wanted the Christmas program to be meaningful. Retelling the story of *Silent Night* became the basis for the show, with a singing and *signing* the song at the end. Little did I know, that someday I would share the same song in a special way with my daughter in California.

During the show, my students told about the little church mouse that ate the bellows of the organ in the church of Oberndorf, Austria, leaving the church without music for Christmas Eve. They told of Father Joseph Mohr's quiet walk home through the snow, reflecting on the first “Silent Night, Holy Night” when our Savior was born, which inspired him to write the lyrics for the song. At the end, they sang *Silent Night, Holy Night* while doing the sign language for the song. It was a special program.

Years later, my daughter Katherine was born. I held her in my arms at Christmas with tears rolling down my cheeks as I thought about all the beautiful Christmas music her ears would never hear. Katherine is Deaf.

But, God has been faithful to put joy in my heart. Our family has learned to communicate through sign language with Katherine. Now, one of my biggest joys at Christmas time comes when Katherine and I *sign* the song, *Silent Night*. I feel “love's pure light” as we share the silence.

***For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. [2 Corinthians 4:6]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 23, 2017**

## **A Stable Lamp**

Twyla Arant

*A stable lamp is lighted, whose glow shall wake the sky.  
The stars shall bend their voices, and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry, and straw like gold shall shine.  
A barn shall harbor heaven, a stall become a shrine.*

*This Child through David's city shall ride in triumph by.  
The palm shall strew its branches, and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry, though heavy dull and dumb,  
and lie within the roadway to pave His kingdom come.*

*Yet He shall be forsaken and yielded up to die.  
The sky shall groan and darken, and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry for stony hearts of men.  
God's blood upon the spearhead - God's love refused again.*

*But now as at the ending, the low is lifted high.  
The stars shall bend their voices and every stone shall cry.  
And every stone shall cry in praises to the Child  
By whose descent among us, the worlds are reconciled!*

*A Stable Lamp* is not the best known hymn, but its haunting melody and meaningful lyrics paint a beautiful picture of the purpose of Christmas. Every word of this hymn speaks to the reason Christ took on human form to be found lying in a lowly manger - He came to reconcile us all to the Father.

For several years, I had the honor of leading music at a small liturgical church, and on Christmas Eve we held a 30 minute carol-sing before we started the 11:00 PM service. It was a special time for gathering as we came together to celebrate the birth of our Lord, and we sang many carols from the denomination's hymnal in that half hour. It was a time to sing so many songs we didn't have time for in the evening's worship each year, mostly familiar: *Good Christian Friends Rejoice*, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, *Hark The Herald Angels Sing* and the like. Yet, there are many unfamiliar hymns with rich messages, and when I discovered *A Stable Lamp Is Lighted*, it became my favorite, and I made sure we sang it every Christmas Eve. The tune is unusual and just stays in my head, keeping the lyrics on a loop in good way. It is such a special song because of what it says: it reminds us of the life Jesus had to lead to save us. He was born, yes, but after being praised in the streets he was crucified, all to save the world and to reconcile us all.

Indeed, the stones that were at the stable, in the road, at the foot of the cross - they all cried out as the final stone was moved away from the tomb! May we always remember as we hear carols in Advent and the Christmas season and we cry out "in praises to the Child", that we must also cry out to the world that Christ is Risen.

***The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined. [Isaiah 9:2]***



[Click here to hear the music video](#)

**December 24, 2017**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve**

**The Coventry Carol**  
Linda Kewin

*Lully, lullay, thou little tiny Child,  
Bye, bye, lully, lullay*

It's December! Deck the malls! So much razzle-dazzle! I admit that I like the hustle and bustle of the season as much as anyone. But, I also cherish those rare moments of reverie, which invariably take me back to my childhood home in Northern Minnesota where December days are short and dark; malls are virtually non-existent; and it is way too cold for even a Salvation Army Santa to come to town. My mother tried valiantly to bring some warmth and light to those cold mornings by lighting an advent wreath as my siblings and I readied for school. She lit all four candles every day! To this day, I remember how I smiled to see those flickering candles shining through the frosty kitchen window into the morning darkness.

Now, here I am in this turbulent twenty-first century once again anticipating the celebration of Jesus's birth, and it dawns on me that the light of the world was born into as dark a century as this one. He, like so many children of this world, was born into poverty and threatened with death, even as an infant – think Aleppo. Yet he brought a message of peace and love that burns as brightly as those advent candles on my mother's kitchen table. With the notes of *The Coventry Carol* running through my head I acknowledge that, for me, advent has always been a tug of dark and light, hope and reality. Ah! Not much different from every season of the year, of life itself.

***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [John 1:5]***



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