



BORN IS THE KING

A Christmas Devotional



O Come O Come Emmanuel!

The writer of this song imagines this as the cry of God's people in a time in Israel's history when the kingdom was divided and the people, including the king, lived in constant fear of destruction from outside forces. Why this cry? In Isaiah 7:14, God gives his people a sign, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The significance of this promise is found in the name Immanuel (Hebrew version of the Greek Emmanuel), which literally means God with us. Some 3000 years ago, what the Israelites needed to comfort their weary souls was the promise of God's presence.

Fast forward the clock to 2020 where we live in a time of uncertainty, fear, and division. I don't know about you, but on those harder days, I've found myself tempted to live like I'm waiting for Emmanuel. Fear and disappointment take deep root, and I mill around my house in a weird, stir crazy shuffle-march before plunking down on the couch to drown my feelings in Netflix and coffee.

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear*

Take a look at the last line in the chorus one more time. Good news: the Son of God has already appeared! We no longer wait in expectation for God's presence to come. Jesus was born, lived, died, and was resurrected. I'd say, that's a pretty solid appearance.

*Lord, we pray that as we move into 2021 we will take time to truly celebrate Christ's birth and that we will let it sink deep into our hearts that Emmanuel has come.
We pray that we can live with great hope and joy as we are comforted by the knowledge that God is (and will always be) with us!*

Written by Naty Severson





*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 appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn*

The dictionary tells us what it means to pine. It is to "suffer a mental and physical decline, especially because of a broken heart" or to "miss and long for the return of."

From the time sin entered the world, people have had a broken relationship with God. In the wake of sin, people were left longing for a way to regain what had been lost. God promised His people He would be theirs and they would be His forever, but God's desperate people were weary and broken. They would never be able to maintain righteousness. They were exhausted and longing for rest. They were desperate for the return of a perfect relationship with God.

Then Jesus came! In a glorious moment, God filled the world with the hope that the weariness was over. The fulfillment of the promise they have been longing for was finally here!

As we live on the other side of Jesus's rescue, we still struggle. We live in a broken world, with broken hearts. We sin and strive daily, wilting and losing strength through long days of desperation. But we have hope! We can rejoice today and every day because Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

God, thank you for being our savior. Thank you for coming to heal our broken hearts and relieve us of our burdens. Help us rejoice in you today. Fill us with hope knowing that you want to enter into our pining hearts to return us to your perfect love.

Written by Brooke Johnson





*God is not not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
with peace on earth, good will to men.*

--I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Big feelings. My two-year-old is in the thick of them--screaming, kicking, pure frustration at the world not looking the way he wants it to. It can be exhausting--the oftentimes copy and paste response. Meeting with him. Helping him learn how to control his body. Teaching him what's good. My favorite is taking a "dragon breath"--which is perfect for inside our home, not so ideal when he's roaring in public! Ultimately my job, as a parent, is to help bring peace in those moments when emotions are overflowing.

2020 has been a year of big feelings for many of us. Frustration, anger, fear, sorrow, anxiety, joy, relief, and so much more. In the midst of those big feelings, it's been easy for my response to look much like my son's tantruming--but this time directed at God. I've struggled with believing in His goodness and grace in the midst of such brokenness all around me. And, much like I do each time with my son, my Father has reminded me that He is the bringer of justice, of peace, of good will to all men. As we look to both Jesus in the cradle and on the cross in this season, let us remember that we are to mirror our Father and be bringers of peace (Matt. 5:9, 1 Peter 3:8-11) and not only good will--but the good news of the Gospel-- into this deeply broken world. God is not dead. God is not asleep. Whether tomorrow or in eternity, He will bring peace (Rev. 21).

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your undeserving patience with our big feelings. Thank you for meeting with us in those moments when we feel most lost, and pointing us back to the truth. You are sovereign. You are good. You have called us to step outside of ourselves and our circumstances to bring your peace and good news to the world.

I pray that in this season, you would bring opportunities for us to share your love and peace with those around us.

In Your Holy Name, Amen

Written by Olivia Disselkamp





*Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die;
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"*

One of the most stunning truths about Christmas is that God set his all consuming glory aside to be born a human.

In his famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Junior writes, "...privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily." Yet this is exactly what Jesus did. He voluntarily set aside the privileges of being in very nature God for that of a fragile and broken body. He left the perfect communion of the Trinity to be ridiculed, mocked and ultimately betrayed. Jesus willingly left heaven, where all is holy and right and good, and he traded it in for a cross.

Paul shows just how much Jesus was willing to sacrifice to demonstrate his love to us: "... though [Jesus] was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:6b-8)

Jesus did not lay His glory aside to live a life of power and luxury as a human. His whole earthly life was one of sacrifice and service which culminated with hands and feet nailed to a tree. God Almighty, died on a cross, to conquer death once and for all. So that those who trust in Him could have life eternal and join the angels in song, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Lord God, we give glory to the newborn king! Thank you Jesus for voluntarily giving up your position of power to be born in a lowly manger. You did this for us, sinners, so that our sins could be forgiven. Lord, help us to respond to your act of sacrificial love, by loving others sacrificially. Give us the faith to voluntarily give up some of the power, influence, and resources you have entrusted to us to serve others. And help us to pray prayers that when answered, would not only benefit us and those closest to us, but also a world that is in need.

Written by Ben and Bekah Wacek





Born is the King of Israel
--The First Noel

I am the youngest in my family, I have an older brother. My brother has often reminded me that his life had changed dramatically when my parents brought me home from the hospital. I like to say it was for the better, I'm not so sure he would always agree. Birth of a new life changes the world as we knew it before.

When I see these lyrics "Born is the King of Israel" it makes me think about how much our lives have changed, definitely for the better. Jesus' birth was a gift in and of itself. The birth of Christ changed the trajectory of the world. This song is a reminder to consistently point our focus back to why we celebrate Christmas in the first place, we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, the fulfillment of his promise to come to earth and the fact that he humbled himself enough to come as a baby. May we be reminded this Christmas that Jesus is alive!

God,

Thank you for sending your Son to earth. We celebrate that you are alive, working and moving. Thank you for humbling yourself in order for us to receive the gift of your Holy Spirit that we do not deserve. Lord, you are worthy to be praised. May this Christmas season remind us of the life that you lived here on earth - may the way that you lived challenge us to model after you. Lord, we love you.

Amen

Written by Sarah Lewis





Nails, spears shall pierce him through, the cross he bore 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 a song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby. Joy, joy for Christ is born, The babe, the Son of Mary.

-What Child is This?

Adore. A word that is defined by words like worship, love, regard with great respect. In our society today, it is not too often that we adore things. However, the one time I think society most often stops to adore something, is when a baby enters the world. We can't help it. Gazing upon a newborn, you can't help but stop and adore the wonder that is new life. The tiny fingers and the tiny toes. The peace and calmness that is present on their face while they sleep. God's work is on mighty display as we behold this new life.

The thoughts and feelings that are stirred up as we stop to adore a newborn are the same thoughts and feelings the Joseph, Mary, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men had the night they met Jesus as a baby. In Luke 2, after the angels appeared to the shepherds sharing with them the Good News about Jesus, the Shepherds were compelled to go and see this child who'd be born. Scripture says

"So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told." Luke 2:16-20

Little did they know the works that they were praising and moments they were treasuring would come to be the story of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. This hymn encapsulates both the wonder that is Jesus's birth as well as the powerful, life giving action of his death. We see both the beauty of Christmas and powerful work that leads us to celebrate Easter.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53: 4-5

As we ponder the birth of Jesus, let us ponder what his life means for all people, what it means for you and for me. Let us offer our praise and worship today for, we also, can adore the new life that is found in him, our King of kings and Lord of lords.

Father, we thank you for the life of Jesus and the work of your mighty hand to bring salvation to all. Help us today, Father, to stop and adore the life of Jesus and consider what his work on the cross and resurrection offers us today. Thank you for offering his life to us as our source of joy and salvation. We love you. Amen.



Written By Kaelyn Larson



*Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace*

For any movie watcher, you're well acquainted with climactic scenes. It's that moment when all the tension of the movie reaches its peak, waiting for resolution. In many movies, it's often a very turbulent scene. In many action movies it's that moment when you wonder if all of your heroes are going to make it out alive. It's a flurry of activity. It has you on the edge of your seat. It's chaotic.

But not so with God. The scene that ushers in Christ's entrance, the soon-to-be-resolver of our greatest tension, is one of calm. That moment, on the pathway to addressing our biggest need, is not one categorized by turbulence. It's silent. It's holy. It's calm.

Chances are as you read this there is much in your life that feels turbulent and chaotic. I know I feel that way. But I pray that we are all reminded that regardless of our circumstances, God is not thrown, He is not out of control, He is not panicked. There is a calm and a peace that flows out of a God that is all-knowing and all-powerful. May we all experience that peace this season.

Written By Jon Neal





Come and Stand Amazed

A paradox is something that appears to be absurd or self-contradictory on the surface, but upon a closer look, is proven possible and even true. The Christmas story is a cosmic gift wrapped in paradox:

God becomes man.
King of kings swaddled and held.
The very Word of God mute in a manger.

The birth of Jesus brings great joy to all who hear, and yet it offends our intuitions. His coming into the world confronts that part of us that always thinks we're right in an argument. It's news with a price tag that we can't pay by our achievements or moral bank accounts. In one sense, the news is God saying to us, "you can't do it."

But this is good news to any who have tried. To those who are tired and weary, Christmas says open your arms and receive real rest. Replace your efforts with awe at the One who is righting all wrongs.

Come and stand amazed. Retell the mystery. Pray the paradox:

*Light of life, dispel my darkness,
Let your frailty strengthen me;
Let your meekness give me boldness,
Let your burden set me free;*

*O Emmanuel, my savior
Let your death be life for me.*

Written By Davis Johnson





*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him
Born the King of Angels:*

"Joyful and triumphant" are not words I typically use to describe the way I feel heading into advent. I often find myself feeling burnt out and somewhat defeated by the craziness of the fall. The days are getting close to their darkest and I've got a few months of windshield scaping ahead of me. Do I even remember what my New Year's resolutions were? At least there isn't a global pandemic going on. The lyrics and tune of O Come All Ye Faithful are a stark contrast to those feelings.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;

This hymn cuts to the chase doesn't it? Get over here! Christ is born! It doesn't matter what your circumstances are or how you've been feeling. Christ is born! What an amazing reminder that I'm not asked to be triumphant throughout the year, I just need to be faithful and trust in Jesus. And because of my faith in Christ, I can share with fellow believers in the joy and triumph of the Christmas season because the King of Angels has been born.

God, I thank you for bringing me into another advent season. Thank you that your faithfulness shines so much brighter than my faithfulness. Help me share in the joy and triumph of the amazing work your Son has done in my life. Help me praise you in the midst of cold, dark days. Help me praise you in the knowledge that you sent your son to bring me, a sinner, back to you. Amen.

Written by Jon Oliverson





*And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!*

There was probably a lot on people's minds when Jesus was born. Rome, the international governing body, had recently transitioned from being a Republic to an Empire which meant that one man, over 1,000 miles away in Rome made big decisions for people. Local matters were handled by the vassal king Herod whose lavish living was supported by burdensome taxes. Much of the money that didn't support his scandalous lifestyle was sent to Rome. He did work to expand the Temple, but he tarnished the project by placing Rome's golden eagle on the gate. When the Jews destroyed the eagle to protect the sanctity of the space, Herod had 40 youths killed as punishment. His slow and painful death that year made space for his son to step up to the throne and rule. Life seemed uncertain and crushing.

It was in those days that burdened shepherds looked up to the heavens where darkness had been moments before, a glimmer. The sky lit up and thousands of angels testified to them that God had not forgotten. Beside that weary road, they rested and heard the angels sing of the peace God willed to earth (Lk. 2:14). God was at work through his Son in those days, and is also at work today. When life is crushing and our steps feel painful, let's take time to rest and hear the angels sing that God is still working for peace in our world.

*God, You are not surprised that our forms are bent low by life's crushing load.
Amidst the burdens we feel, help us to rest along life's weary road to listen to your
promises. Amen*

Written by Nolan Bauer





*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"*

Today our society is highly divided due to political and cultural issues. You yourself may be disappointed, disillusioned, and dismayed by how 2020 has gone for you. Perhaps it is safe to say that you have wrestled with understanding where your joy truly comes from.

You are not alone. In ancient eastern times, the Israelites were in a dark season where God had departed from them and not spoken for 400 years! During those years they were oppressed by several empires, including the Roman Empire. They waited, and waited, and waited, for a messiah to be ever present and save them from their despair. But for 400 years God was silent.

Until one night in the midst of a dark night, the skies broke open and an Angel declared the beauty of Jesus being born (Luke 2:11). This was HUGE!!!! Finally the King they long awaited for was here. The Israelites finally had hope that a redeemer would come and save them.

However, Jesus Christ did not come in the way they expected. He did not come to save them from the Roman Empire. He came to reconcile sinners and all of creation back to himself. Like 2 Corinthians 5:18a says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."

So today, take heart that if you are in a dark season, God's light will break through the darkness. Your joy will not come from a political power but a person, Jesus Christ. Remember, your joy is found in the ever-present reality that Christ came to rescue you from your sin, and he will come back to restore you and all of creation back to him (Col. 1:20)!

Heavenly Father, let me walk throughout my day full of joy knowing that you came for those who are in the outskirts like me. Let the world see how glad I am because I trust not in my circumstance but you.

Written by Ken Freire





*The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight
-O Little Town of Bethlehem*

My favorite days of the year lie between Christmas and New Years. The hustle and bustle of the Christmas season has ended, baked goods are still everywhere, and the fridge is bursting with leftovers. My family hunkers down in sweatpants to watch football. At meals and between games we tell stories of what the last year has brought us. I love those sweet moments spent reflecting with my loved ones, reminiscing and then prepping and planning for the new year.

I don't need to give you a run down of this year's challenges, you have seen enough of it yourself. And as much as we may hope that everything will change when the clock strikes midnight, when 2021 ushers in the world will still be broken.

Even still, the hopes and fears of every year, every moment, have been met in the birth of Christ, our almighty God sent to earth for us. The child in the manger held the hope of all humanity even before he accomplished anything in his earthly life. The arrival of Jesus was worth a chorus of angels proclaiming the glory of God because the child in the manger holds the hope of every promise given by the Father. He alone can give you hope in any circumstance.

Lord Jesus, you know more than anyone the hopes that were dashed this year. As the celebration of your earthly arrival approaches, I pray that my hope would be wrapped up solely in who you are and not in my own circumstances, for you alone are worth putting my hope in. Thank you for coming to earth for me.

Amen

Written by Haley Braaten





*"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."
-In the Bleak Midwinter*

Christina Rossetti wrote these words in the mid-1800's, as a woman devoted to her deep Christian convictions and rich artistic abilities. She lived her life faithfully serving God through care of underprivileged women, her family, and prioritizing the Word of God while also struggling with chronic illnesses. In this context, Rossetti understood that she approached the God of the universe without the status of many worldly achievements. She didn't have grandiose wealth, degrees, or careers. However, we see from this verse that she knew that none of that matters to our God. All we need is to open our hearts to God, nothing more. David echoes this truth in Psalm 51:

*"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise."*

We do not need to try to approach God in our "Sunday best", but approach Him humbly as we are: sinners in need of a savior. There is no sacrifice or work we can do to fix our brokenness in the presence of God or bring us into an intimate relationship with Him. But in this season, we remember the birth of Jesus, whose perfect life and sacrificial death made it possible for us to be in a restored relationship with God.

Father, we confess that we so often feel the need to work for your approval. In this season, please continue to remind us that you desire our hearts, no matter what condition they may be in. You are the One and only One who can mold our hearts to look more and more like yours. Thank you, God! Thank you for bringing your Son to earth. Thank you for Christ's death and resurrection that has allowed us to partake in a relationship with you. Help us to experience your rest and peace that comes from believing and trusting in your works, and not our own.

Written by Kaia Abrams





Good Christians all rejoice, with hearts and soul and voice; now you hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this. He has opened heaven's door, and we are blest forevermore. Christ was born for this; Christ was born for this.

Paul exclaims in Philippians 4:4 to "rejoice in the Lord, I will say it again, rejoice!" Come on Paul! Five times you were given 40 lashes, three times beaten with rods, shipwrecked multiple times, spent the night on the sea hanging on for dear life and you feared for your life throughout your ministry, what in the world are you rejoicing for? While your life may not include being shipwrecked or being lashed with a whip, it can still feel overwhelming when you consider the trials of your life.

This Christmas hymn reminds us that Paul along with us can rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances. This season we are reminded to focus on the greatest gift we could ever receive and rejoice in, the birth of Jesus. His birth opens up for us eternal pleasures and eternal joy forever more! Forever more, think about how long that will be! We are truly blessed if we cherish and rejoice over our high king's birth! This Christmas allow yourself to rejoice with your whole heart and soul and voice! The great exchange has happened; God made him, who had no sin to be sin so that you and I could become the righteousness of God!

*Oh Father, grant it I pray for all who are reading this short devotional to give their whole heart and soul and voice to praise your name. You know our daily struggles with relationships, death and trials of all sorts. Turn our heart of stone to a heart of flesh and our eyes towards you. In peace may we lie down and sleep for you alone
O Lord make us dwell in safety. Christ was born for this.*

Written by Stan Oawster





Come, Thou long expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free; From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee. Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art; Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart."

-Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Every Christmas I look forward to singing this hymn together as a congregation. Those first five words are a prayer in itself, "Come, thou long expected Jesus!" For thousands of years the Israelites prayed and waited for the Messiah to come. The One who would save them from all the injustices and evil of the world. Yet with each new individual that was raised up to deliver them, they were left searching for someone greater to come. Fast forward to Bethlehem many centuries later, where a little baby is spending his first night in a stable. That small child was the One they had been longing for, the time was finally here! Jesus had come!

Christmas is a reminder that Hope has come, that God has sent his Son into the world to take away our sins. How sweet is that! When we belt out, "Come, thou long expected Jesus," we look back to Christ's birth and remember God's faithfulness in keeping his covenant. But we also look forward to the day Jesus returns and restores all things. We long for that day where injustice is met with God's perfect justice, when we will be united with God, and when there will be no more mourning or pain (Rev. 21:3-4). This Christmas season, let us remember Jesus' finished work and eagerly look forward to when we stand together with people from every tribe, tongue, and nation and worship Him in all His glory (Rev. 7:9).

Lord, we are in awe of who you are and what you've done. We wait for your return, for the day when you restore all things and make them new. Help us find rest in your finished work at the cross that has set us free from all sins, past, present, and future. Come quick, our long-expected Jesus!

Written by Sadie Berg





*I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
For poor on'ry people like you and like I
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.
- I Wonder as I Wander*

Recently, I've been valuing time spent in the great outdoors with God more than ever. In that time to reflect, think, and pray-- I can relate to the author of this Christmas folk song, "I Wonder as I Wander". As I walk through God's creation, hearing the sounds of my feet against the forest floor and observing the many intricacies of the landscape before me, my mind slows and filters out the day to day distractions-- leaving room to think about and be present with my Creator.

I find myself experiencing the words of the psalmist in Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge."

As we wander, we can remember that Jesus, God incarnate, once too wandered on this earth. He was born here to die. And in this season we celebrate that birth, knowing that Jesus' life and death to come brought redemption to us. As we wonder, we can remember the great mercy and grace our God has given us, to come and save you and me-- plain, ole' imperfect people. In this season, I encourage you to find time to wander. Wander and wonder deeply about our God and the gospel-- that Jesus, being perfect, made Himself a sacrifice for us to redeem us, without us needing to do anything in return.

Father, thank you for your gospel, your good news, that refreshes us daily. Thank you for sending your Son to earth, to wander with us and to save us. I pray that you would bring a time today to still our souls and be present with you. Help us to see the ways you proclaim yourself all around us and to remember the work of Christ.

Amen.

Written by Kaia Abrams





*God rest ye 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*

Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world, 1 John 4:4. Everyone that commits to sin is guilty of high treason and we all know this. You and I are traitors to the Most High. Satan wants to remind you of this daily. He shouts that you will never measure up, you repeat the same sin over and over again. It isn't that God can't forgive you, but that you don't really believe he will! How can we ever fight the constant condemnation?

Comfort and joy comes from believing in the promises of God. One such promise in 1 John 3:8, stating that Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil. What is this work of Satan that Jesus destroys? Satan is called the great accuser; his only power is to accuse you by reminding you that you have gone astray and that your sin condemns you. Fight back with joy in Jesus for there is now no condemnation for those who rejoice in Jesus. You are a new creation, Satan can accuse but he has no authority over you. Oh tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy!

Jesus, remind us this Christmas season of your absolute authority over the works of the devil and that there is absolutely no condemnation in us, your children. We are free in your love and grace to live the life you have given us in your strength to share this good news of the gospel with others.

Written by Stan Oawster





*"He rules the world with truth and grace"
- Joy to the World*

Songs like Joy to the World are what I love about Christmas. They are packed full of great theology and there is so much to unpack in such a simple little phrase. It always astounds me to walk through a mall during Christmas time and hear them playing carols like this as background music for the shoppers. So many people happily singing along and proclaiming the truths of the gospel one after another!

Sometimes, after a year like this past one, I have to remind myself of these truths. I have to slow down and let the words actually sink into my soul. I have to remind myself that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and that this same God still rules the world today. And not only that He rules the world, but He rules it with truth and with grace. That Jesus came into the world to bring hope and truth and light and peace...and to give His life so that we may have life.

I always come away from an election year feeling frustrated because the ideas of truth and grace seem almost non-existent. How many times have you thought, "I don't even know who to believe anymore"? We live in a world where we are taught that we all need to find our own truth, and the idea of grace is twisted into being a weakness. But I would encourage you to fear not, because we serve a God, the creator of the universe, who is Truth and who is Grace.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." - John 1:1-5

Jesus, help us to look to you as the source of all truth and all grace. Help us to live grace filled lives and to let your light shine through us as we proclaim the gospel to a world that is so desperately searching for truth and so desperately needs your grace.

Written by Jamie Anderson





*I am a poor boy too I have no gift to bring
that's fit to give our king I played my drum*

I grew up thinking that The Little Drummer Boy was the worst of all Christmas songs. Give me the moving crescendo of O Holy Night or the awe of Silent Night acapella. But the steady, droning “pa rum pum pum pum” sound of The Little Drummer Boy over and over and over again?

As is the fate of all parents held captive to the musical likings of their young children, I started to actually listen to the words of The Little Drummer Boy afresh when this song became my three-year-old son Judah’s favorite Christmas song—a song my wife would sing to Judah just about every night as he went to bed.

The scene of the song is the birth of baby Jesus, our world-changing, servant King laid in a feeding trough, and the song imagines a little drummer boy whose words are these: “I am a poor boy too I have no gift to bring that’s fit to give our King”

What a simple and honest profession before God Almighty, “I am a poor boy too.” It is a profession of poverty that runs counter to everything our culture tells us to strive for and proclaim about ourselves. We are to be put together and omni-competent at work, in family life, at church, online, and beyond—I am supposed to have much to bring wherever I go. Scripture says something different. It says what most of us know to be true. There is pervasive brokenness deep within me and wherever I go and within the groups and systems I engage with. In the words of the little drummer boy, “I have no gift to bring.”

But the amazing news of the gospel is that in the face of the little drummer boy’s profession, the boy is not spurned and turned away. He is not cast aside. Even before Jesus, the second person the Trinity in whom the fullness of God dwells, the story does not end with a poor boy with no gift. The saving work of Jesus brings us in when we should be cast out.

The little drummer boy’s act of worship is in the final words of the song: “I played my drum.” There is no orchestra. There was no crescendo. Like the widow who gave two small coins out of total poverty, the little drummer boy played his drum. “Pa rum pum pum pum.” It was all he had, and it was true. It was a steady drum and the poor boy played to give glory to our King. That is all that God asks of us as we wake up today—in loving our families, in working our jobs, and in being neighbors. That we would follow and bear the image of Jesus, not out of wealth or competence, privilege or influence, but in response to His amazing saving work on the cross, through which we were made rich *when we were poor beyond measure.*

*Dear Jesus, help us play our drums, steady and true, day-by-day, as poor boys and girls,
for our newborn King. “Pa rum pum pum pum.”*



Written by Bryan Freeman



*Emmanuel, Emmanuel
Wonderful, counselor
Lord of life, Lord of all
He's the Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Holy One
Emmanuel, Emmanuel*

I love this list of who Jesus is. It only scratches the surface of the many names that reflect Him but these are some of my favorites. Emmanuel means God with us. God has every right to keep His distance from us, yet He chooses to be with us. In Genesis, God is in the garden with Adam and Eve. Later He sends His son to earth and He is called Immanuel. (Mt 1:23) Before Jesus leaves earth He tells his disciples that the Father will send another helper, the Holy Spirit. He will be with you and live in you. (Jn 14:16-17) From the beginning and to the end, God has made himself available to us.

The triune God is here with me so why do I avoid spending time with Him? Reading His word? Praying to Him? Praising him? Obeying him? I need every aspect of God. He is so good for my soul and yet I forget and go about my day. He is an ever present help in times of trouble and He is always present in times of joy. Emmanuel is always turned towards us with arms open wide both in our most sinful moments and our most pure moments. He is with us and loves us unconditionally for His glory and our joy.

The Wonderful Counselor wants to hear your heart and comfort you. The Holy one causes us to be in awe and worship him. The Prince of Peace offers peace beyond our understanding. The Lord of Life, Lord of all created you and you can trust His sovereign reign. Our Mighty God, nothing is too big for Him.

This Advent season let's practice being present with God.

God thank you for being with us. Holy Spirit, remind us of your presence throughout our day. Give us ears to hear you and eyes to see you at work in and around us. May our hearts be full of joy because we can have a relationship with you.

Written by Carol Oawster





*I'll be home for Christmas You can plan on me
Please have some snow and mistletoe And presents by the tree
Christmas eve will find me Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas If only in my dreams*

HOME. The place where you belong, where you are accepted as you are and loved beyond measure. Where rest embraces you and you are refreshed again.

Few, if any, seasons of the year evoke the longing for home like Christmas. Dreams, movies, songs point toward an idealized picture of family gathered joyfully, warm fires in the hearth, the problems of life fading in the darkness of the snowy night. Dreams of home. For many, those Christmas dreams are always out of reach, out of touch with our earthly homes and families, no more than a wish and a prayer. Families are broken, conflict abounds. Life is full of heartache and struggle. Yet, the dream of home remains. A longing for a perfect home that we have never actually experienced, a whisper of heaven we can not quite grasp.

One of the beautiful promises of Christmas is that Jesus has left His home to come to rescue us, to bring us home with Him again. By becoming fully human, by overcoming temptation and dying for our sins, by conquering death forever, He invites us to come home for the first time. Home. In the presence of God, where we were created to be - fully loved, fully embraced, fully cleansed of the brokenness of our lives and our world. Christmas is an invitation, Christ has come to live with us, so that we might live forever with Him, at home. Proclaiming, as in C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now...Come further up, come further in!"

Come home this Christmas, come to Jesus. Be welcomed into the family He has always had for you - His family, the Church. He will give you fellowship, love and purpose within Himself, His love for you is for today, for the healing of your heart and hope for your life and after this life is ended, He will bring you Home, at last.

*John 14:1-3
Revelation 21:3-4*

Written by Meg Hintz





*When I was a seeker I sought both night and day
I asked the Lord to help me and he showed me the way
-Go Tell it on the Mountain*

Security, safety, belonging, control, purpose. These are just a few of the things on the list of things that I long for in my life. The past year has been uniquely challenging in so many ways for a lot of us, and I have struggled to put into words the feelings that are in my head and heart. In all of life I am a seeker, but the question that I think this year has repeatedly asked me is "What are you searching for?"

As followers of Jesus, we are called to live as exiles in this world. God asks us to lovingly engage the world around us while maintaining our commitment to him and the truth of the Gospel message. One of the passages in scripture that really captures these ideas is Jeremiah 29. While many of us can likely recite Jeremiah 29:11 from memory regarding God having plans for his people, we are not as often mindful of the context and audience for Jeremiah 29. This letter was written to those Israelites who had been taken captive from Jerusalem by the Babylonians and were now living in a land that was not their home. They had been torn from familiarity, safety, and comfort. There was no temple to worship at. There were no promises of an easy life. Yet, if we examine all of Jeremiah 29, we see that God is asking the exiles to continue to live their lives and to be faithful to him. He encourages them to settle in the land and to seek the peace and prosperity of the city. God encourages these people to seek him with their whole heart and promises them if they do they will find him.

These song lyrics from "Go Tell it on the Mountain" remind me that God is asking all of us to keep seeking him as well. This song was born out of the suffering of African-American slaves as a spiritual they sang. These were people who were in their own type of exile. As I put myself in the position of a slave, I consider what they were reminding themselves of by singing this song. I believe the slaves were reminding each other to keep seeking and hoping in God despite how their circumstances looked. They were striving to continually remind each other that there is a better story that is worth telling over and over again. There is a God who sees us, who identifies with our suffering, and who loves us enough that He did something about it. Jesus is born! He has come down to make his dwelling with us. We are all seekers, but as believers we can seek with purpose because we know what we are looking for. God has shown us the way by sending his son as the great rescuer and liberator. He has shown us the way! Let's praise him and continue to seek him this Christmas and always.

Jeremiah 29:12-14

Father, thank you that you want to be found by us. Thank you that you are a God who has made yourself known to your people. Help us to be seekers and allow us to continue to see you and the way that you are moving and showing us the way. With you we have full confidence that any exile we experience on this side of eternity is not all there is. Something better is coming. Help us to hope. Help us to keep seeking your face. We need you so much each and every day.



Written by Ben Johnson



*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.
Joy to the World*

We moved into a house in winter when the ground was covered in snow and what lay beneath was a mystery. As the spring weather warmed and melted the snow the yard was revealed to us. It wasn't the lush green grass that we could lay on during hot summer days, but dirt, rocks, and weeds. As far as you could see, our yard was full of weeds, choking out any kind of grass. It took us years to kill the weeds and cultivate the ground to have even a little bit of green for picnics and games.

When Jesus is born, the weeds and thorns of sin and sorrow tremble because their days are numbered. Jesus brings the power to kill sin, sorrow, and death to all of our lives, as far as the curse is found. Not just killing the weeds in your yard, but your neighbor's yard and beyond. Let us rejoice today because as weeds are uncovered in our lives, Jesus has come to make his blessings flow and grow us into lush green pastures, full of life, a blessing to those around us.

*Jesus, let your blessings flow.
I confess that I have allowed weeds to grow,
Choking out the life, encouraging death,
Causing sin and sorrow to rule.
Today I turn to you, The Gardener,
Who kills sin and brings life.
I need you, and worship You alone
For coming to bless us.
Bringing Joy to the World.*

Written by Drew Zuehlke





*Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be?
Which inspire your heavenly songs?
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Angels We Have Heard On High*

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.

The account of the birth of Jesus in Luke is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. I love the imagery of the shepherds out in the fields on a quiet, still night, when BAM! An angel just appears to announce the birth of the Chosen One, the long-awaited Messiah. And before the shepherds have time to recover from terror, the heavens are filled with even more angels singing praises to God.

And then they're gone. The night is still again.

I would need to sit down and process what just happened. What do the shepherds do?

They hurry to go see if what the angel told them was true. And they find Jesus, and Mary, and Joseph, as promised. They share their story, and more people are amazed. As the shepherds go back home, they are "glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told" (vs. 20).

Are we this quick to pursue what God is doing now? Are our hearts eager to praise Him?

Your Majesty, it is hard sometimes to see how you are working in our midst. Yet You are faithful, and we can be assured of your promises because Jesus was born. Open our eyes to see how You are moving and inviting us to bring light and life to the world.

May we encounter the risen Jesus this Christmas season and have hearts that are quick to join with the heavenly host in worship, singing "Gloria in excelsis Deo!"

Written by Erica Messerli





*Joy to the world, the LORD is come,
let earth receive Her King;
let every heart prepare Him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
- Joy to the World*

Joy to the World is one of my favorite Christmas songs. Not only is it one of only a handful of hymns we regularly sing that's in a major (happy sounding) key instead of a minor (sad-ish sounding) key, it's actually proclaiming the birth of Jesus. Which means, the song finds its fullest form and expression on or after Christmas Day, not before. When we sing it, especially on this Christmas Day, we are joining the angels that sang over Jesus' birth so many years ago. We are joining the chorus of the saints that have gone before in saying "the King is here!!" We are singing about the culmination of so many promises and prophecies found in the humble form of a baby boy lying in a manger. And the emotion, the expression of it all, is JOY!!

On this Christmas Day - we are no longer in Advent (a time of waiting and anticipation for Jesus) but rather moving towards a time of Epiphany (Jesus has shown up as a baby - a human!!). And just as much as God sent Jesus into the world to accomplish things for the Kingdom that is His, we are now similarly sent into the world, proclaiming a message of JOY to the world. Proclaiming a message that Jesus did not come into this world to condemn, but to save (John 3:17), and for that, we can be joy-filled today.

*Father God, we are tremendously grateful to you, that you know what you're doing.
Your plan to bring salvation, to redeem your lost people included sending Jesus,
your son, to be born a baby boy. Out of that gratefulness, we proclaim "Joy to the
world" because salvation is found in no other name. We confess, our hearts make
room for many things of this world. May we turn to you, the giver of life and life
abundant, to find true joy and meaning on this Christmas Day. Amen.*

Written by Jordan Anderson



But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Galatians 4:4-5

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

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:10-12



Hope Community Church 2020