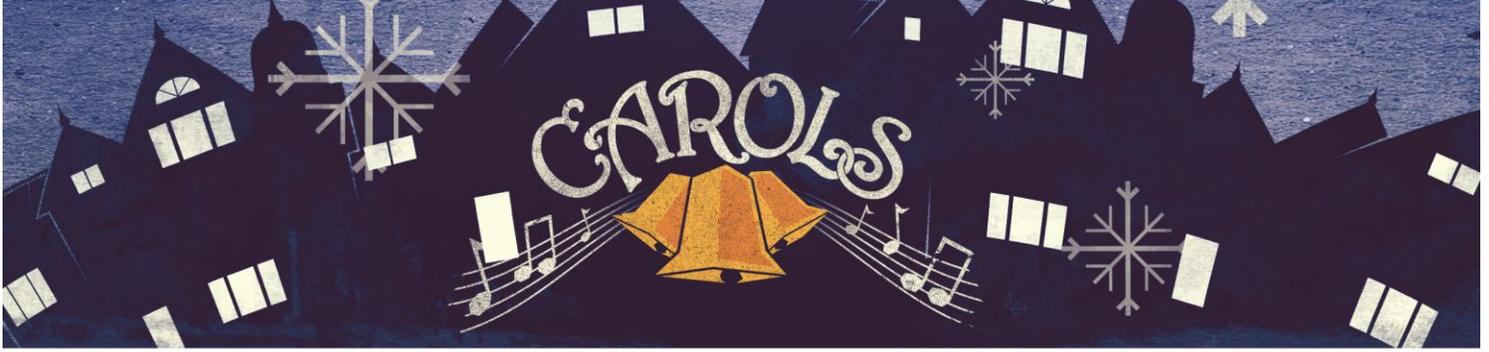




Carols: A Christmas Devotional

*God is with us - in answered promises, realized dreams, and refreshed hope.
How could we help but sing?*

During this Christmas season, explore the songs that were born from our joy that Christ has entered the world and rediscover their relevance in your life today. As you read these Carols devotionals over the next 25 days, allow God's truth to be revealed to you just as it was revealed to all of mankind just over 2,000 years ago on that holy night in a little town called Bethlehem.



Joy to The World

Joy to the World, the Lord is
come! Let earth receive her
King.

“... for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Nehemiah 8:10 NIV

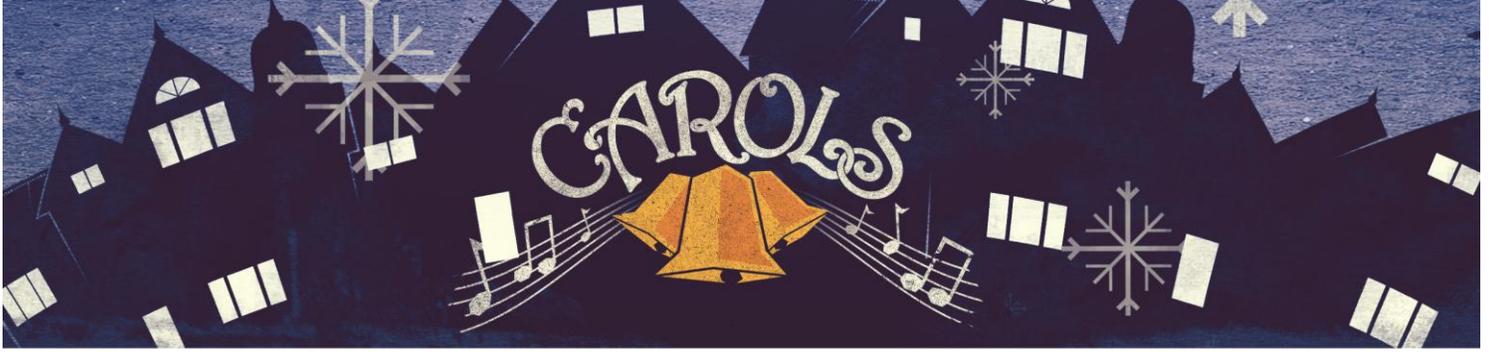
Isaac Watts wrote “Joy to the World” in 1719. Since then, every Christmas season, carolers cast those words into the air like a lifeline out into the ocean of humanity. And every “fish” surely finds something inviting and worth nibbling at. The thrill of hope within the message spools out to touch a weary world with anticipation of tasting something really good!

Joy came to the world because God our great Creator loved His creation so much that He sent His Son to reveal His story, and so that over time, His character and ultimate good will toward mankind would be recognized. The impact on earth of Christ’s birth will never diminish despite enemies’ attempts to stop it. John 21:25 says that the world would not be able to contain the books that could be written about what the Lord did while on earth. Since then many more testimonies of His transforming love have been and will be written.

Nehemiah 8 records that Nehemiah, the leaders and the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with great joy, after sharing God’s Word. Rejoice in God’s Word and thoughts of the Savior’s birth, His purpose and His inheritance.

Questions:

What do you plan on rejoicing about during this Christmas season?



Angels We Have Heard on High

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

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!

Luke 2:14 ESV

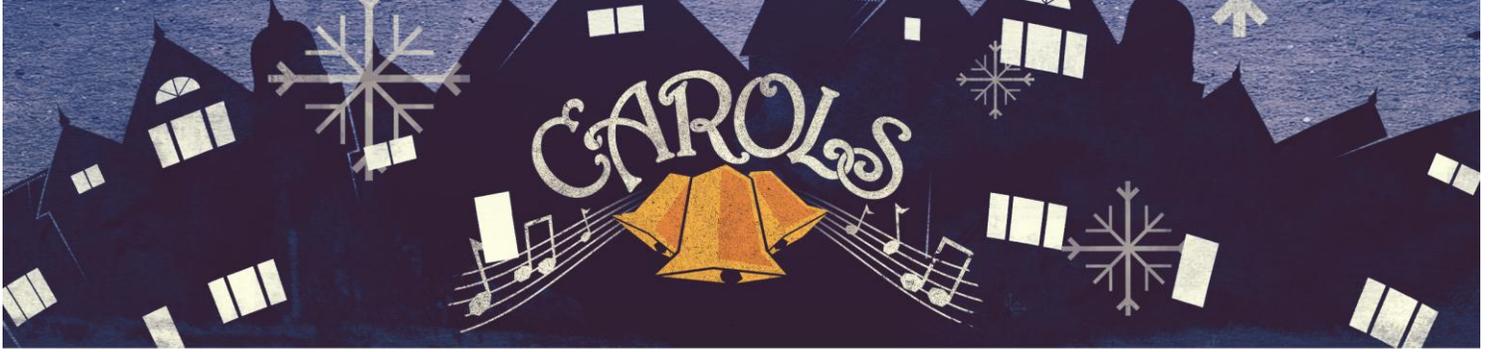
What gives you awe? What things cause you to become speechless when you see them? Is it the sight of a family member you haven't seen in years? Is it visiting a majestic place like a mountain or a historical place like the ancient pyramids of Egypt? The night Christ was born was the most monumental and awe-inspiring event that has ever occurred in human history as God sent His one and only Son to earth so that we could ultimately have eternal life. There has not been an event in history before or after Christ's birth that resulted in such celebration that the angels themselves made their physical presence known and their voices heard in song. Can you imagine how the shepherds' jaws must have dropped at the site and sounds of the angels? That moment was so majestic that we probably cannot fully comprehend what it was like because honestly, none of us have encountered such a sight.

It seems like people tend to have fewer experiences these days of complete awe. Technology has brought so much of the world to our living rooms and fingertips that we can see anything we want and feel like we are at anyplace we want to be. Unfortunately, most of us probably have fewer awe-inspiring moments with God like we should. Our relationship with Him often becomes too comfortable and even ordinary. This Christmas, try to regain those awe-inspiring moments with God. Strive to make your relationship with Him something so inspiring that it causes you to rejoice like the angels did. Don't let your relationship with Him be ordinary, but rather make it extraordinary.

Questions:

Describe some of the awe-inspiring moments you've had with God. How have these moments impacted you?

What changes do you need to make in your life so that you can start having more awe-inspiring moments with God?



Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas

Have yourself a merry little Christmas, let your heart be light. From now on, our troubles will be out of sight.

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10:41-42 NIV

Christmas can seem like a rat race at times. There is all of the hectic last-minute shopping at crowded malls while struggling to find the perfect gift for someone, the decorating the house (including checking every single bulb on the strand of lights to find the one at the very end that shorted out the rest), wrapping present after present after present, or preparing for the family to come and take over the house for the day. It is easy to get lost in the busyness of Christmas, and to miss the things that are really important.

We see this happen in the book of Luke, when Jesus goes to eat in the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha spends her time running around cooking, serving dinner, and cleaning, which are very good things, but are busy things. Meanwhile, Mary sits in the company of Jesus. When Martha asks Jesus to tell her to work too, He tells her that, “Mary has chosen what is better.”

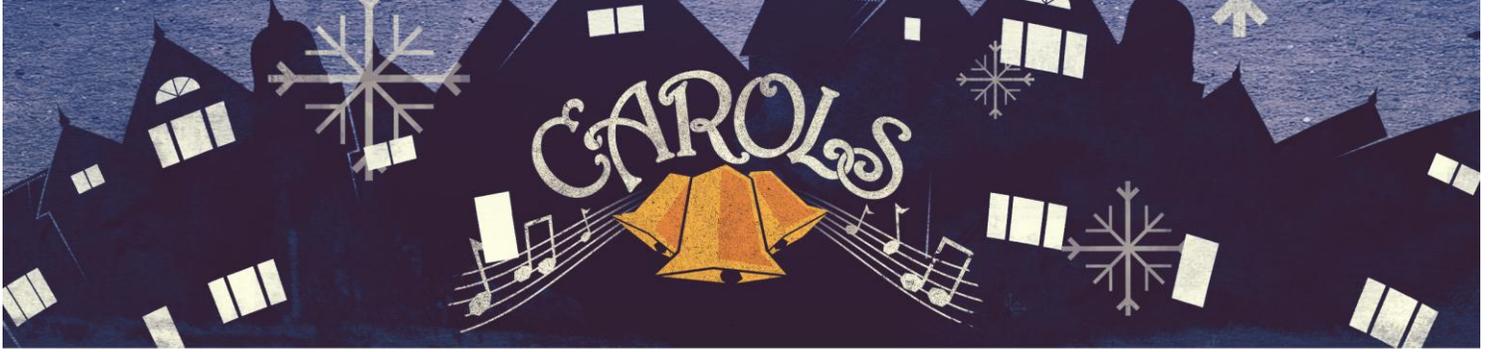
Jesus is trying to tell us to live in the moment. It is great that you are willing to be like Martha, and make sure that all of the popcorn is strung up, but it is not worth missing the opportunity to have a real conversation with a family member you don't see often, or when your child's face lights up because Santa indeed got that letter and delivered exactly what they asked for. It is not about all that we have to do, the list of things we have check off, but it is all about the moment.

This year, don't miss out on what is better. Take the opportunity to enjoy the time you have with friends and family. Take time not to worry about the things you have to do, but to enjoy the people you get to be with. Be present where you are, because that is what is better, and have yourself a merry little Christmas.

Questions:

What are some things you need to take off the list to make yourself become more like Mary?

What are the better things that you are chose to be a part of this Christmas?



I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

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

The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Psalm 29:11 NIV

Who is God to you? Is he your protector? Your provider? This Christmas Season, have you allowed him to be your peace?

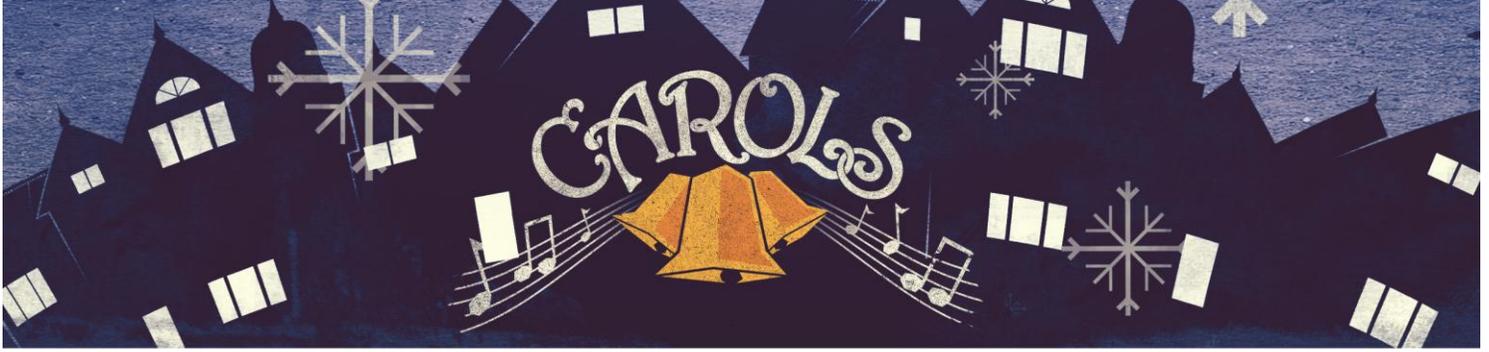
It can be easy to view God simply as a friend to go to in times of trouble or a magic genie that grants all of your prayers. But God is so much more than that, and the blessings he wants to give to you are endless! He offers so many wonderful things—completely free of charge—including hope, joy, and peace for your heart. God wants nothing but the best for you.

Although your circumstances may be difficult, or hard to understand at times, that doesn't mean that God isn't there. He cares about you and loves with a giant-sized love, and he's waiting for you to let Him be your peace. So, this Christmas, as you think about all the gifts you need to buy, and your never-ending to-do list, don't forget to stop and remember that only God can provide you with the unwavering quiet strength that comes from his peace.

Questions:

In what ways do you find peace and comfort in God?

What difficult circumstances are you currently dealing with that you need God's peace in helping you endure?



It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

When the new heaven and earth shall own the Prince of Peace,
their King, And the whole world send back the song which now
the angels sing.

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Revelation 21:3-4 NIV

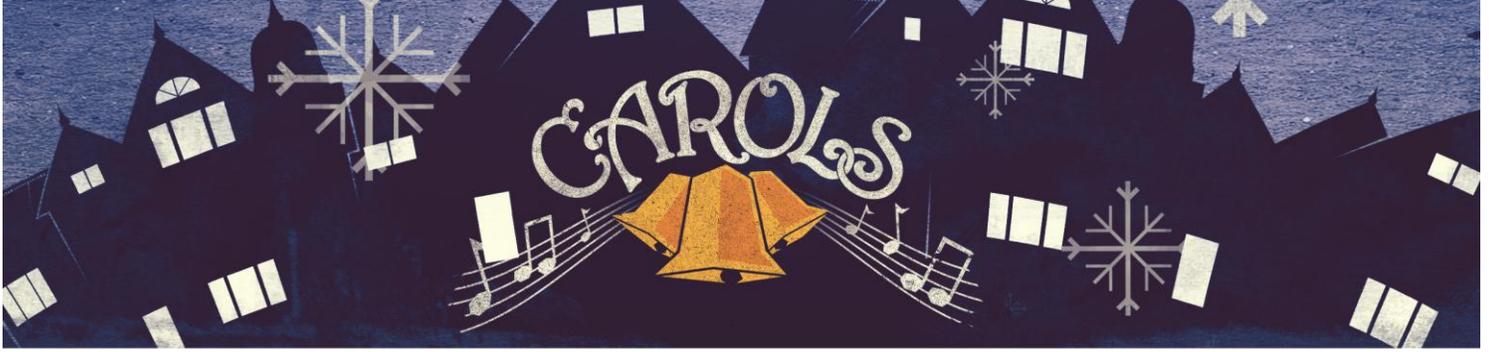
When the angels first sang about peace on Earth and goodwill to all men, the shepherds must have wondered what was going on. They certainly didn’t hear angelic choirs every day, and First Century Palestine was hardly a peaceful place. The streets buzzed with rumors of revolution and the tension often boiled over into violence. Society was split along lines of gender, race, wealth and religion, and the shepherds themselves were only a few rungs above beggars on the social ladder. For some of us, Christmas itself is a time to be with friends and family, but for others it reminds us that we are alone or separated from loved ones. Two thousand years later, we seem to be as far as ever from Heaven on Earth,

Many people in the First Century were expecting a quick fix for the world’s problems, and of course that didn’t happen. It still hasn’t happened. But Christmas reminds us of God’s promise to bring in a kingdom where wars, injustice and even death will be a thing of the past, and where we will live together with God. That’s our hope. God does have a plan. The best really is to come.

In the meantime, God continues to show his love to us in so many ways. He provides for our needs. He answers our prayers. He invites us to start living today like citizens of the kingdom that has not yet been fully revealed. We can love one another as Christ loved us here and now. We can show his compassion and his unconditional acceptance to others today. We can experience a foretaste of the new Heaven and Earth right now. We can share that experience with others. And we can do all this in the knowledge that God’s Kingdom will prevail and that the whole of creation will one day see the truth that those shepherds heard on a remote, Palestinian hillside.

Questions:

What one thing could you change to give those around you a foretaste of God’s Kingdom of peace?



Mary Did You Know

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your Baby Boy has come to make you new?
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you.

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

Luke 1:38 NLT

Have you ever listened to the song Mary, Did You Know?

This touching song has been played for well over three decades during the Christmas season. The lyrics are beautifully written and contain powerful phrases like Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand and that This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you. It's a stirring line of questions by the songwriter that cause listeners to stand in amazement at the power of our God.

We really don't know much about Mary except that she was a virgin and probably in her early teens. According to Luke 1:28, we know that she was "highly favored" and that "the Lord was with her". Even without a stunning resume, God used her. Sweet, little Mary who kept to herself and wasn't a big "play maker" was invited by the Creator of the universe to change the world.

Many think the reason He chose her is because of her willingness. Upon hearing how this would play out in her life, Mary's response was, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." (Luke 1:38)

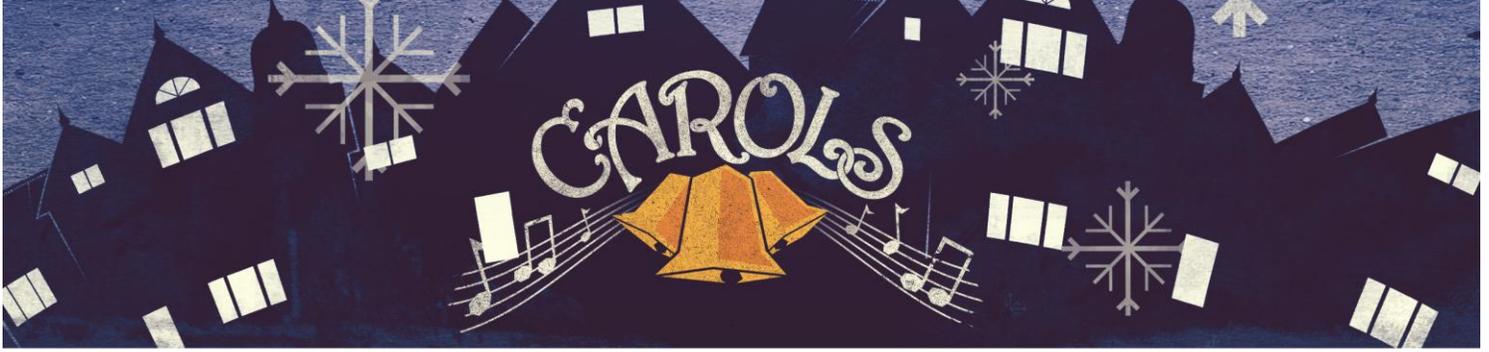
Mary simply said yes to her Lord with no conditions whatsoever.

Where are you in your life right now? How much of "you" have you truly surrendered? Are you living the truth that "your life is not your own" and that you've been "brought with a price"? Is there something that you are missing out on because you won't let Him lead?

We have a Messiah. His name is Jesus. He is the Savior of the world. He walked on water without a single bit of effort. He came and died to make us new. He gave sight to a blind man with some dirt and saliva. He woke up from a deep sleep and calmed a raging storm with his human hand. He fed over 5,000 people with a tiny bit of bread and fish. He does the miraculous.

And He has amazing plans for your life.

Questions: What have you not surrendered to God? What is keeping you from doing so?



O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee, O Israel.

“...and they will call him Immanuel,” which means “God with us.”

Matthew 1:23 NIV84

Time after time, the Israelites found themselves separated from God - always by their own doing. And God would eventually deliver them, only to be betrayed by His chosen people again. So we find two constant themes in the Old Testament:

- The Israelites, no matter how hard they tried, were unfaithful God
- God remained faithful and fulfilled the promises He made to them

Through His prophets, God made many promises. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Emmanuel.” The name Emmanuel translates as “God with us.” It’s a remarkable promise - the Ultimate Being and Creator of the Universe promising to make Himself physically present with the people who have proven themselves unworthy.

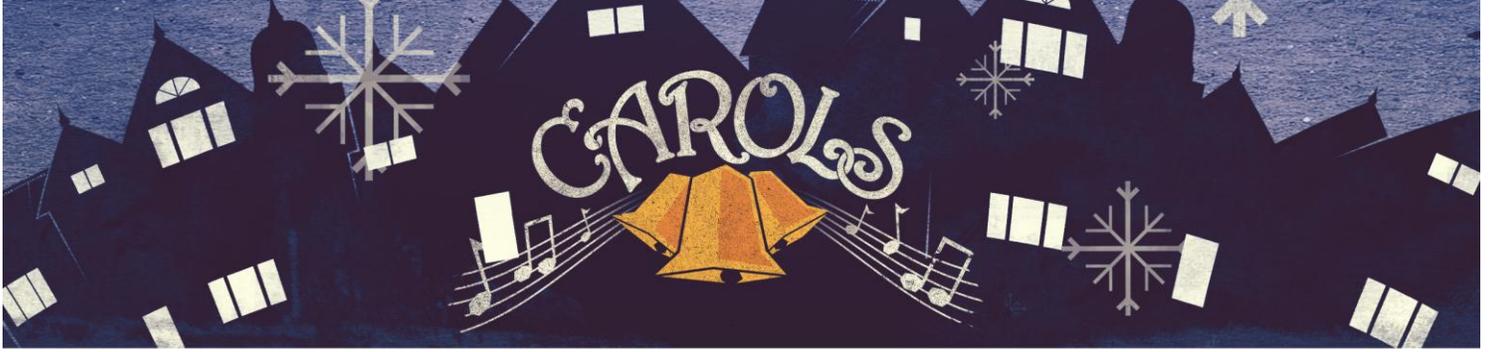
In one of the most somber Christmas song, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, there is an embraced tension within Israel. They are in exile, separated from God yet again. With a sober perspective, they choose to rejoice in the promise God has made to them. With nothing else to cling to, in the midst of desperation and loneliness, they recall and proclaim the promise that God would be with them - knowing that, in spite of their unfaithfulness, God is faithful to His promises.

No one could have expected a baby in a manger to be the start of God’s perfect plan to be “with us.” And yet, that is exactly how God fulfilled His promise.

Are you waiting for God to come through on a promise He has made? Do you feel a sense of loneliness or exile? Rejoice! Rejoice! Through Christ, God has made Himself present to us. His faithfulness is greater than our failure. And His presence is all the reason we need to, once more, rejoice!

Questions:

Since God is “Emmanuel,” how is God *with you* this holiday season?



Away in A Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for His bed;
the little Lord Jesus laid down His
sweet head

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:6-7 NIV

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is born in a manger with not so much as a bed to lie on. The humble beginnings of our Lord's life remind us that we are to be humble and thankful for what we have been blessed with. The true meaning of Christmas is reflected so poetically in the story of Jesus' birth that we cannot help but find ourselves grateful for all that was given to us on that day.

The song describes how even when Jesus wakes, he does not cry out or make a sound. This day was a day of rejoicing, and the baby lying awake on the hay was no ordinary child, He was the Savior of men! The last verse of the song asks the Lord to stay beside us, to lead us, and to eventually take us to Heaven to live with Him. How often is that our prayer? Stay beside me Lord as I make my way through this earthly life.

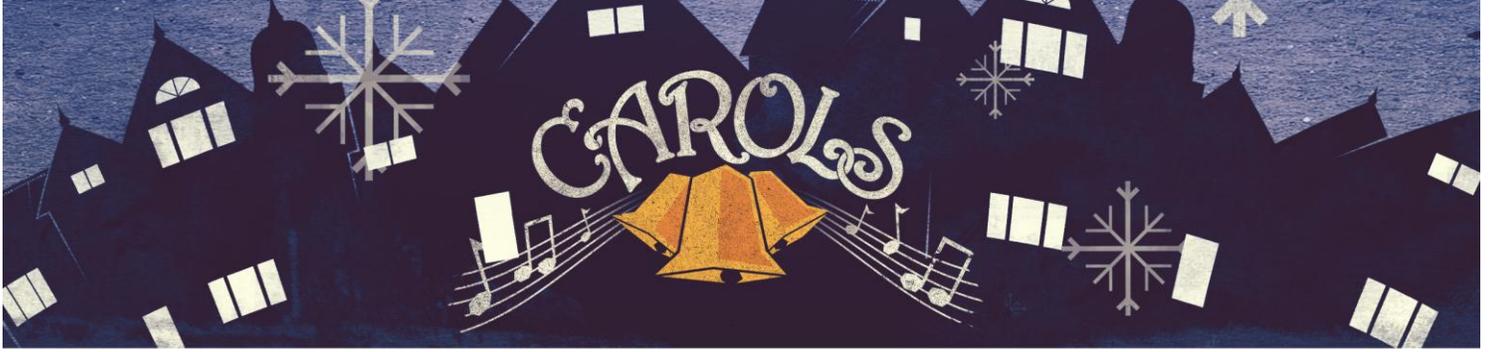
How glorious and beautiful is the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrate His birth and the life that was given to us by Him through His life, death, and resurrection.

Questions:

In your opinion, how does this carol reflect the love of Christ?

What does this carol show you about our Lord at the beginning of His life here on earth?

Why do you think God chose for his son to be born in a manger instead of a birth fitting of royalty?



Ding Dong! Merrily on High

Ding dong merrily on high in heav'n the bells are ringing:
Ding dong verily the sky is riv'n with Angel singing.

The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:11-12 NIV

We seem to have so many bells and chimes and rings in our lives. Whether the microwave is letting us know that the "homemade" chicken nuggets are ready, or our car is beeping to tell us that our seatbelt is unbuckled, or that super annoying "aaaaee! aaaaaee! aaaaaee!" coming from our alarm clock is piercing through the dark bedroom to jolt us from our slumber; our lives are surrounded by noises and alarms. These alarms can mean so many different things.

From this classic, beautiful Christmas carol we are drawn a picture of the celebrating chimes from heaven. It's almost as if the author of this song is describing the way we might hear a call from heaven. In several different passages, scripture describes how someone heard from God. In some instances, it was a booming sound like thunder and in others a still small voice.

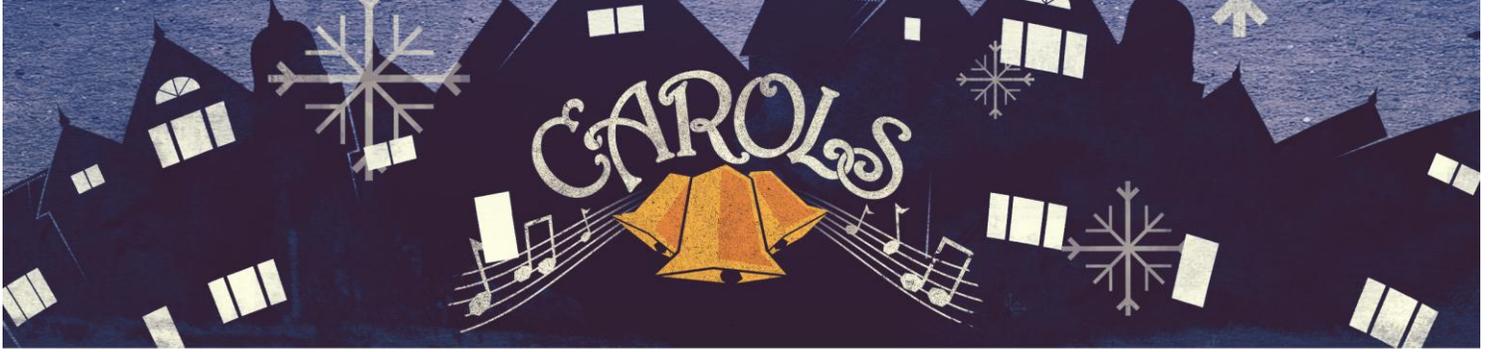
Have you ever heard that gentle whisper calling you like Elijah heard in 1 Kings 19:12? God can call us in so many different ways. But what he calls each of us to is unique. He may be calling you to minister to a friend going through a tough holiday season. He may be calling you in your profession. God can use doctors to serve those who cannot afford treatment, contractors to build a school in a poverty-stricken country, a lawn care worker to cut the grass of an elderly widow in the neighborhood, or whatever your talent might be. The important thing is for you to listen to His voice, just like the beautiful chimes from heaven. He is calling you to be a light in someone's life this Christmas.

So, go ahead and hit that snooze on your alarm clock, but answer the call of the Father on your life.

Questions:

How have you heard from God in the past?

What is God calling you to do for someone else this Christmas season?



Do You Hear What I Hear

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?

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 NIV

Over 2000 years ago, the Savior of the world was born. Have you ever stopped to think about how people found out about His birth? The song "Do You Hear What I Hear?" gives us an example of how the news of His birth might have spread.

The song starts with the Holy Spirit asking the lamb, "Do you see what I see?" The Lamb then goes to the shepherd and asks, "Do you hear what I hear?" The Shepherd immediately goes to the King and asks "Do you know what I know?" When they shared what God had told them, an entire nation heard about the birth of their Savior, Jesus, and what His birth meant for the entire world.

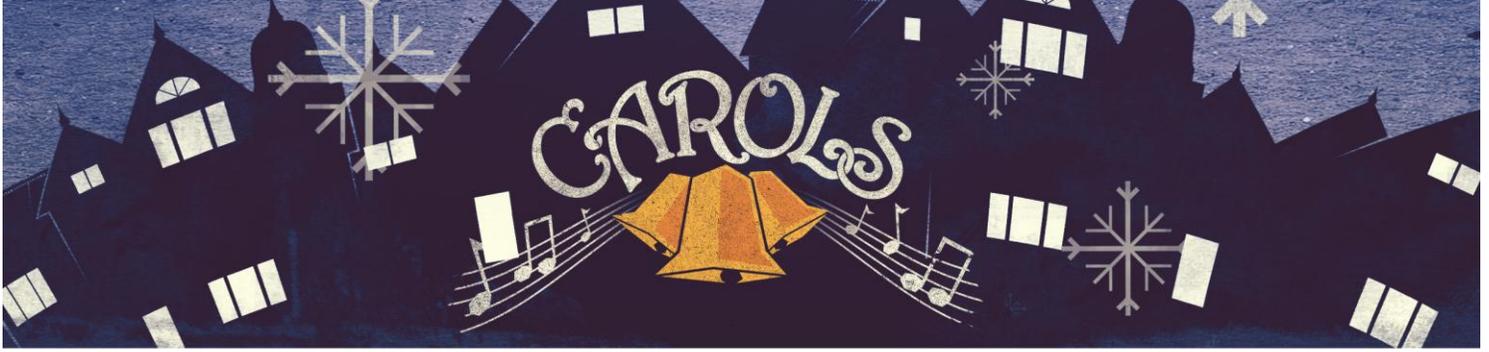
Here's the great news: this too is our calling as followers of Christ - to share with others what we have been told! God reveals Himself to all of us in different ways, depending on our personalities and gifts. For some, He shows us visible things about Himself, like a star in the sky. For others, we hear His voice; and then some of us grow closer to Him best through our intellect. The question is what are we doing with what God gives us? We have to realize that God will use us to bring people to Him through what He has revealed to us.

In this song, God chose a shepherd boy's voice to tell others about what He had heard and, as a result, an entire nation heard about Jesus' birth. What about today? If we want people to know about a Savior that has been born, we have to take the time to share with others what He is revealing to us. Lives are changed when we tell the people in our lives what God has shown and done for us.

Questions:

What has God shown or told you lately that you should be sharing with others?

In what ways does God reveal Himself to you?



I'll Be Home for Christmas

Christmas Eve will find me, where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas. If only in my dreams

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control

Philippians 3:20 NLT

The term home is simply defined as this: Where one resides. A familiar setting. A place of origin. Where's our home?

Our home is the place where we've spent most of our years growing up and making memories. It's where we took our first steps. It's where we learned to drive a car. It's where we had our first crush. It's the place where we graduated high school and college and maybe even met our spouse. Or our home may be the place where we now reside. A place where we've grown into the people we are now. Home for us is where we feel at ease with those we love the most. It's the place where we can be ourselves and not worry about the world outside. Home is where our heart is.

Or is it? According to Webster, our home is where we reside, it's our place of origin, our familiar setting. But according to the 1 Peter 2:11, our home isn't in this world:

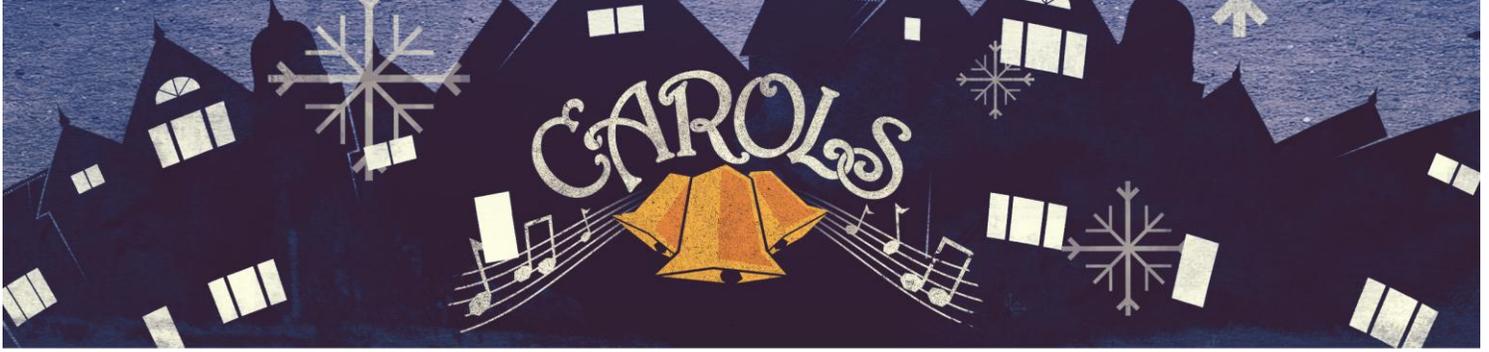
Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying places on earth. We have wonderful memories and experiences in different places our entire lives. But we weren't meant to be 100% at home here. Our home is with our Jesus in Heaven. Until He says it's time to be with Him, we'll stay here. And as much as we love our earthly homes, we'll never be fully satisfied. It could be what songwriter Laura Story says in her famous song, Blessings:

What if my greatest disappointments or the aching in this life is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy.

Only Christ can satisfy. Only His presence and peace can bring us pure, unadulterated joy. Only His comfort can truly take us off the ledge of disappointment and disaster. One day we will truly be Home with Him. Not just for Christmas but for eternity. And what a day of rejoicing that will be!

Questions: How can you allow Christ to satisfy you and to fulfill your every need this Christmas season, instead of relying on what the world can give?



Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

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.

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 NIV

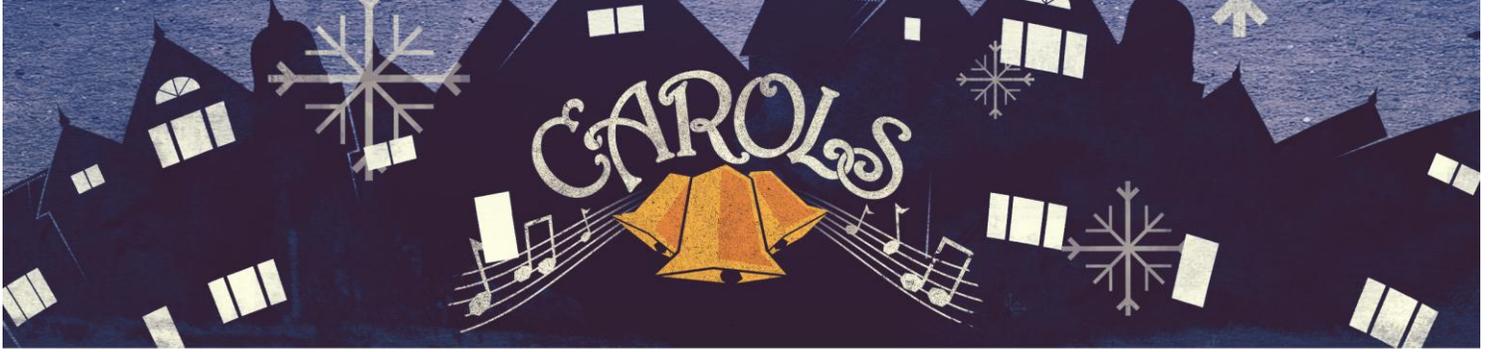
It's fun to look at a tiny baby and imagine what he will grow up to become. It could be anything – a pilot, a policeman, a chef, an astronaut, a pastor, or a million other options. The future is wide open and full of possibilities.

Jesus was born with one purpose. As it says in the carol, he was “born that man no more may die.” His birth was all about our new birth. In 1 Peter 1:3, Peter praises God for the “new birth into a living hope” – and all that is possible because Jesus laid aside his glory and offered Himself in our place, taking the punishment of death we deserved for our sins. His death and resurrection give us new life. As you go about your business and your busyness of the season, intentionally take a few moments to slow down and remember that Jesus was born to give YOU a second birth. What a reason to praise Him!

Questions:

How do you express your gratitude to Jesus for the new life He gives you?

Who in your life doesn't yet realize the true reason for Jesus' birth? What will you do to share it with them?



Still, Still, Still

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.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”
Psalm 46:10 NIV

Still, still, still... These words do not seem to have a place in the hustle and bustle of a busy life, especially at Christmas time. Parties, presents and projects usually have us in a frantic frenzy as we rush from one event to the next. Often, before we know it, Christmas day has come and gone and we realize that, despite our good intentions, we never experienced the peace that comes from truly relishing in God’s amazing love for us.

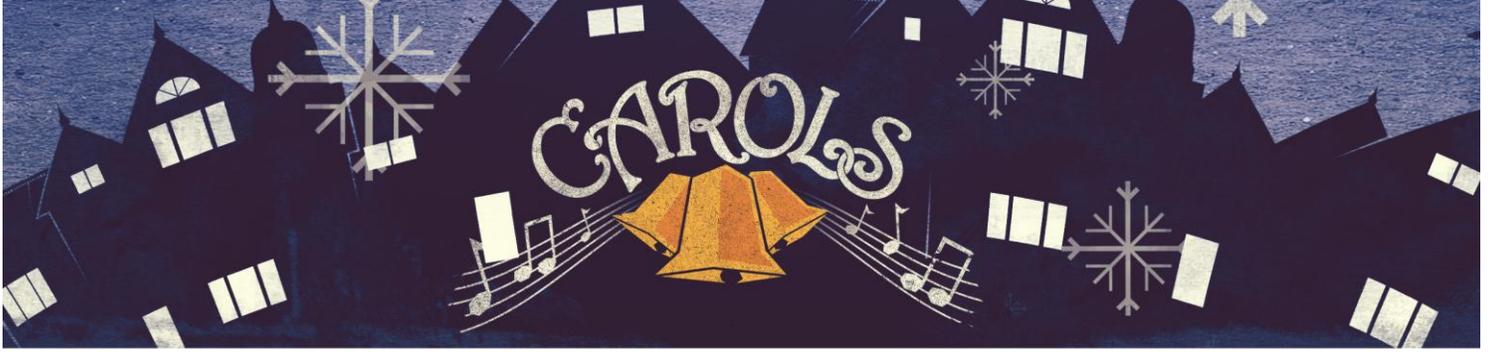
Isn’t it interesting that God commands us to “Be still”? Do you think it’s because he knows we sometimes have a hard time doing it on our own?

What happens when we actually take time to be still? The answer lies in Psalm 46:10...“Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”. When you are still before God, you better understand that whatever you are facing, whatever your day has been like, you can completely rest in the fact that God is God. He’s awesome and amazing and sovereign. He loves us more than we can imagine and He’s got things under control.

Spend time today purposely pursuing stillness in different moments. Perhaps you could wrap up in a blanket & head outside for a peek at the stars, wondering what that holy star looked like, the one that signaled Christ’s birth many years ago. Maybe take a minute to watch your young child sleep and you wonder what Mary and Joseph thought of their newborn son as you gaze at your own child’s sweet face. Open your Bible, read a favorite Scripture...then sit and wait.

Questions:

What truths resonate in your soul about Christ as you take time to be still before Him?



The Christmas Song

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose,
Yuletide carols being sung by a choir, and folks dressed up like Eskimos.

I live in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit-crushed, And what I do is put new spirit in them, get them up and on their feet again.

Isaiah 57:15 MSG

If there's one song that has the "Christmas Spirit" it's this one. It makes us think of a scene from a Norman Rockwell painting. Or maybe we imagine carolers coming to our doors while we offer them some tasty, homemade apple cider fresh off the stove. We attend parties at friend's houses and services at church. Let's not forget about being all bundled up on Christmas morning with our families while the most beautiful snowflakes fall to the ground.

And then in the midst of our Christmas illusions, our children storm into the room yelling "Mom!" or "Dad!" because someone hit them or because one of them use the other's pellet gun without asking or because one of the neighbors took the basketball away that they had or because they fell off the zip line. Oh, for the love of all that is good and right in the world, can we not stay in our little piece of Christmas paradise just a tad bit longer?

That's life, isn't it? No matter how perfect we try to paint the canvas of our lives, there will always be something extra put on it that wasn't in our minds when we dreamed it. Something that cramps our perfect picture. Something that breaks our heart.

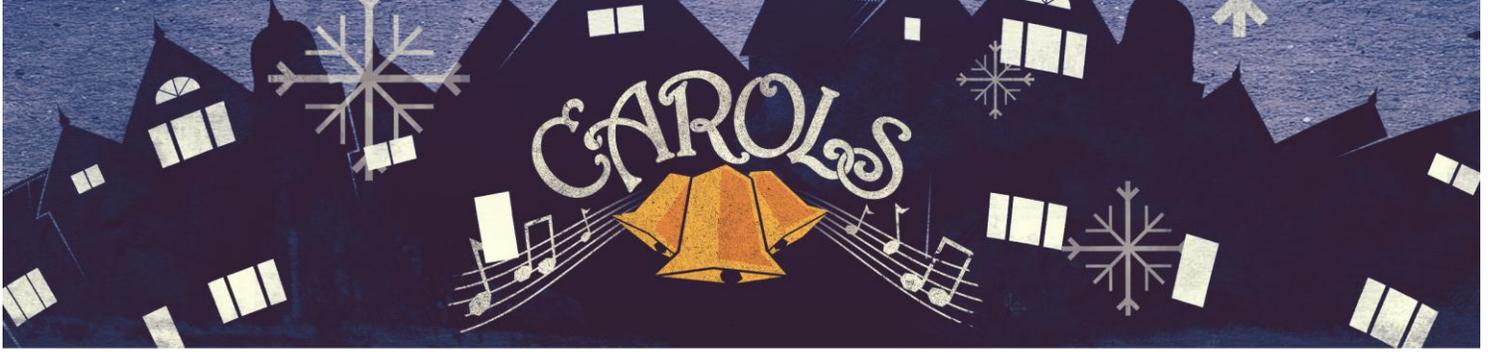
A relationship that ended. A loved one who died prematurely. The betrayal of a friend.

Did you know that God isn't surprised by the interruptions in our lives? In fact, nothing surprises Him. Don't mistake bad things happening in your life as Him not being in control. No, this is not about His ability but about His sovereignty.

While we may wish that bad things would never happened in our lives, they will happen. Jesus said we'd have trouble (John 16:33), but He also promised that He'd calm us in the midst of it (John 14:16). So, no matter where we are in life, whether we expected to be on the path we are on or not, rest assured, that our God can make broken things beautiful.

Friend, we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who've been called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Press on and trust in the One who will never let you down.

Questions: How have you seen God in control in the midst of life's interruptions?



The First Noel

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

“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 NIV

It is widely known that Noël is the French word for Christmas, but do you know the original origin of the word? Noël comes from the Latin word natalis, meaning “birth.” Therefore, the title of the hymn, fully translated, is “The First Birth.” This song is about the Nativity Story, the birth of Jesus as we see in the Bible. Angels came to Joseph and Mary, telling them “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).

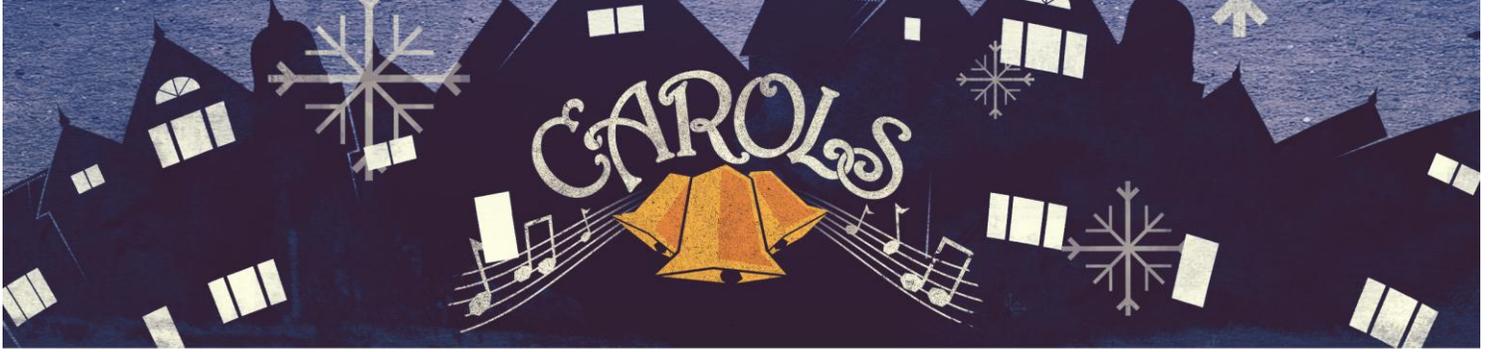
Jesus came to save us from our sins. That is what this season is about for us: the remembrance of this birth, and the life of Jesus. He was born here, lived here, died here, and was raised again here, all so that we had a new way to find relationship with God. This song reminds of the hopes and the expectations of salvation that came with the birth of Jesus, and serves to remind us that, no matter where we find ourselves in our lives right now, that this Jesus was here, and we will always have hope in that. This is a chance to celebrate not only the newness of his life, but this season all provides you an opportunity to start your life over with a new birth.

Whatever sin, whatever shortcoming, whatever failure, whatever weakness you have, a child was born, and he has come to save you.

Questions:

What are the things that you need Jesus to save you from?

How could this birth change the lives of people you know this holiday season? What will you do about it?



The Little Drummer Boy

Come they told me, Pa rum pa pum pum
A newborn King to see, Pa rum pa pum pum

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life-your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life-and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.

Romans 12:1 MSG

The night was silent, except for the beating of his heart. It seemed so loud to him, he wondered if his traveling companions could hear it too. He was nervous to see a king, but he kept walking, holding tightly to his drum.

His heart was about to beat out of his chest. The others were carrying beautiful boxes filled with precious gifts, gifts worthy of a king. He had nothing but his drum which suddenly seemed an inappropriate instrument to play for king, not to mention a newborn baby king. If only he had a more soothing instrument, like the harp the shepherd boys sometimes play.

His heart beat was deafening as he stood before the king. And then Mary nodded. The King's mother nodded at him.. She actually wanted him to play. He raised his sticks and began to beat out of the first pattern that came into his head, the rhythm of his beating heart.

And so the Little Drummer Boy gave his heart to God. He played his best. He gave his best.

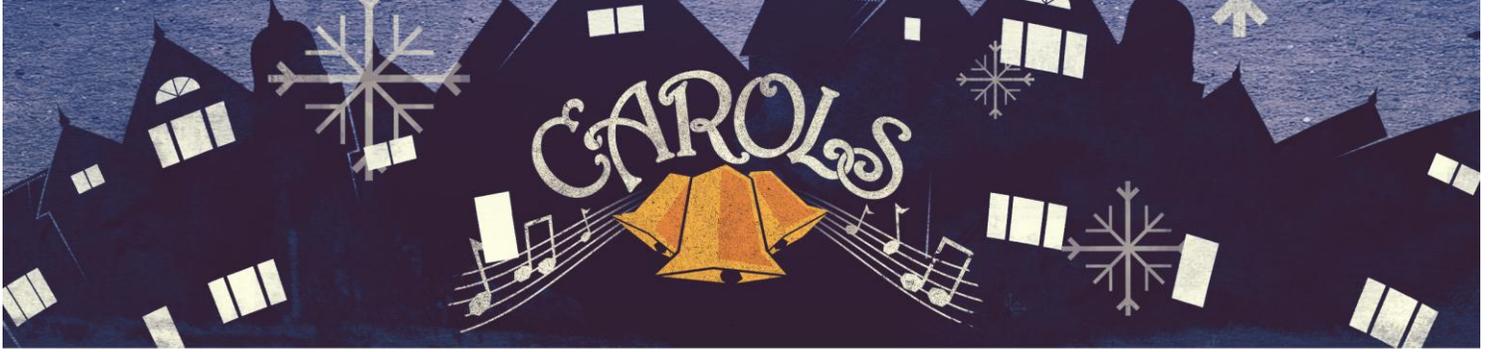
How often do we feel our gifts are not good enough? We compare ourselves to others, wondering why their gifts seem so much more "useful" for the kingdom. We want to teach like our Pastor, or sing like our Worship Leader. Or maybe we want to share our blessings, but at times, we don't feel very blessed. We can't give what we don't have, but rather than lamenting our lack, we need to look for our "drum", the one thing that only we can give.

The truth is God already has teaching like the Pastor's. He already has singing like the worship leader's. And what He wants, what He can really use, is your heart.

Think of ways that you can bless others this season and in turn bless God. You don't have to spend money. You just have to give of yourself, of your heart. Just like the little Drummer Boy. And Jesus smiled at him. Think of Jesus smiling at you. Kind of makes your heart race, doesn't it? Listen.

Questions: How can you bless God by blessing others this holiday season?

Are you giving your best to God? If not, how could you give your best to him today?



We Three Kings Of Orient Are

O star of wonder, star of
night, star with royal beauty
bright,
westward leading, still
proceeding, guide us to thy
perfect Light.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

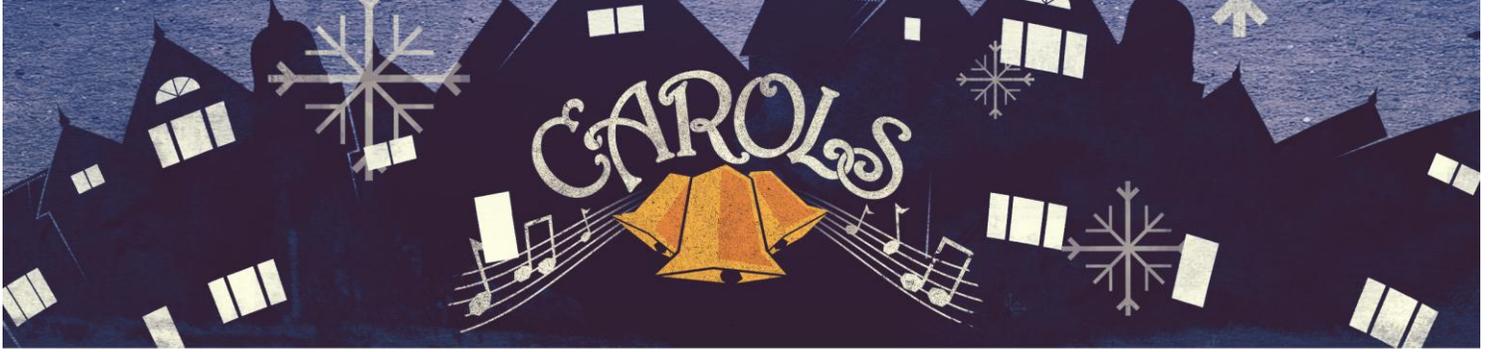
It's often difficult for people to understand that Jesus was born just like us. He wasn't born in a luxurious palace or a fancy hospital. He was born outside, in a manger. He came into a world filled with sin, yet he lived an absolutely perfect life. He came to lead us, and guide us into a loving relationship with God.

The three wise men are a great example of what complete submission to God looks like. The moment they saw the star they likely dropped everything they were doing and embarked on a long journey that was most likely difficult at times. The men had no idea where they were going, but placed their complete trust in a star to lead them. They devoted everything to seeking Him no matter the cost. Just like the three men in this song followed a shining star to see Jesus when he was born, if we submit ourselves to God, He will direct our paths and be a perfect guide for our lives.

Questions:

What are the areas in your life you need to submit to God?

Try to remember a time where you did submit something to God. What was the outcome of that situation?



When A Child Is Born

...new hope, new life. Many things come to pass with the birth of a new child.

For a season, everyone, forgets their own weariness and own problems. This tiny creature will change people's lives...forever.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon[a] his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6 ESV

There is nothing like the announcement of a new baby to bring excitement in a family. As the song says, "...new hope, new life. Many things come to pass with the birth of a new child. For a season, everyone, forgets their own weariness and own problems. This tiny creature will change people's lives...forever."

Expectant mothers gain a lot of attention, as friends and family are typically very intent on being involved in the entire process of pregnancy up until the very end. When the moment finally occurs, there is nothing like the sound of a newborn baby's cry to validate the life that has been growing and developing over the past nine months, and create such overwhelming joy.

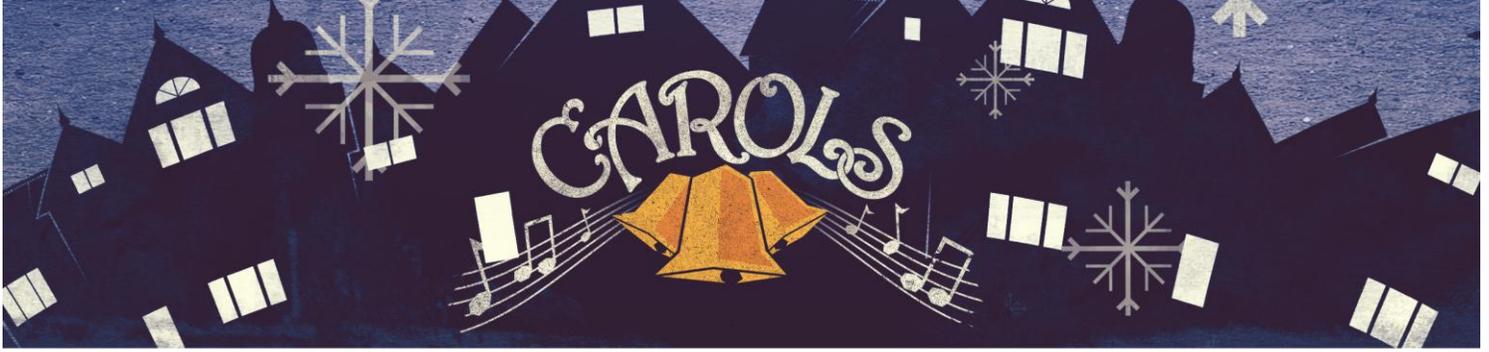
The same excitement that comes from physical birth also occurs when we experience spiritual birth in that moment when we ask Christ to become our personal Savior and Lord of our lives. In fact, many people now celebrate both their physical and spiritual birthdays because they understand the day Christ came into their life is just as important as the day they came into being.

Imagine the joy that was evident at Christ's birth in that His physical birth would ultimately change mankind forever. We can have spiritual birth because of His physical birth. John 10:10 says, "One...came...that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." We have a new life all because of one child: Jesus. As you reflect on this Christmas season, be thankful for God did by sending His only Son so that we can have new life. Be thankful for that holy night when a child was born so that we could be born again.

Questions:

What led you to your spiritual birth?

What does new life in Christ mean to you?



O Holy Night

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

He is a light to reveal GOD to the nations, and he is the Glory of your people Israel!

Luke 2:32 NLT

In the midst of so much imperfection, the night Christ was born can be considered one of the most perfect nights ever in the history of mankind. God used imperfect circumstances and an imperfect location in the form of a humble manger to bring His perfect and holy Son into the world. God could have easily made Jesus' birth triumphant, but He chose not to. It is through all that imperfection that made this night so holy and so perfect.

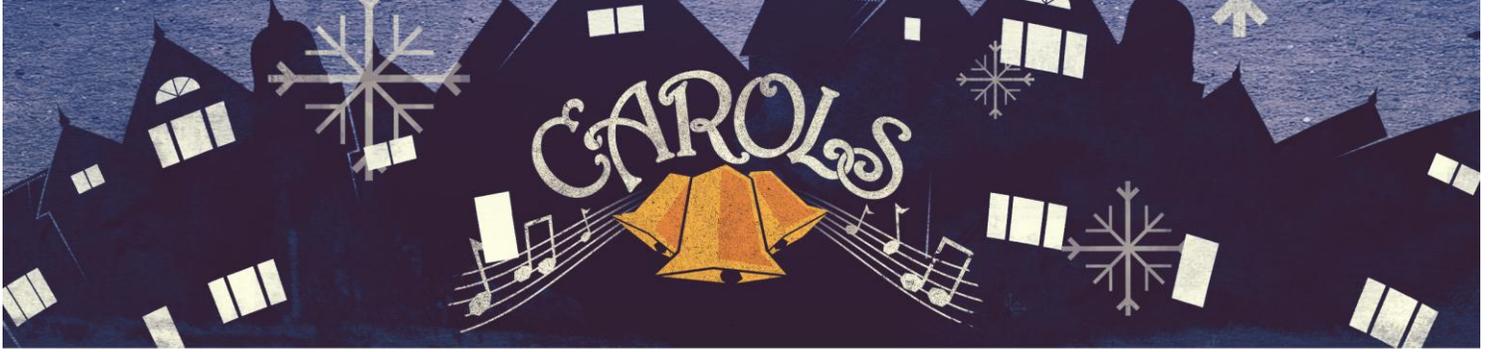
The way God brought His son into the world is much the same way He works within our lives. Oftentimes God takes the imperfections in our lives and uses them to perfect us. God loves to take the physical and emotional scars and use those to grow us into stronger people. He also desires us to take what we learned from our imperfections and help others who may be struggling with the same things.

Just as Jesus was a light to reveal God to all the nations, we can be that same light as well. Don't let your imperfections hold you back. Instead, allow God to use them to shape you into the person He designed you to be, which is a light in a dark world. Give God your weaknesses so that He can turn them into your greatest strengths.

Questions:

What weaknesses do you need to give God so that He can perfect you?

In what ways do you see yourself as being a light to reveal God's truth to others?



O Little Town Of Bethlehem

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

Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

1 Corinthians 1:27-28 NLT

Bethlehem. A town which could be considered tiny and insignificant. Micah 5 describes Bethlehem as being "...small among the clans of Judah." Yet Micah goes on to say "out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel." Sure enough Jesus was born in Bethlehem some 700 years later.

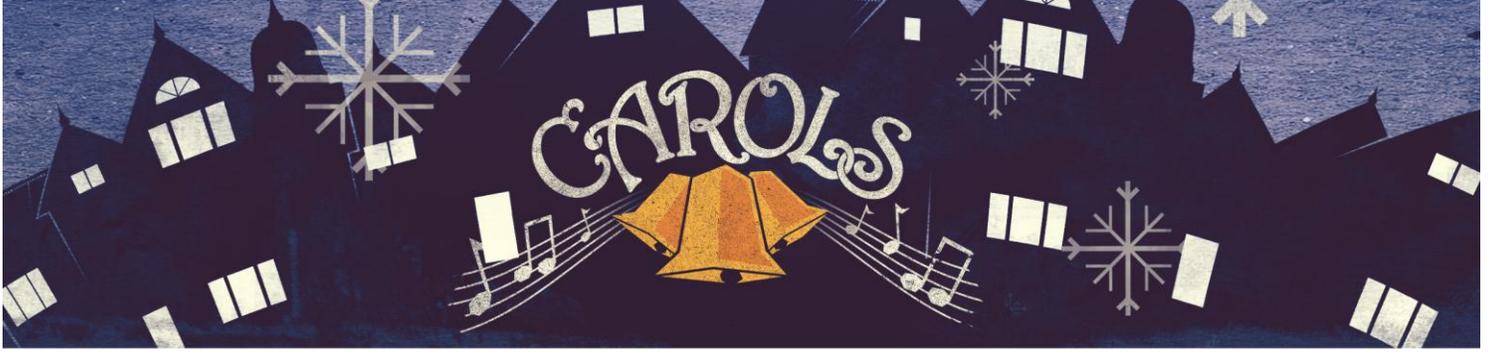
The significance of insignificant Bethlehem can't be understated. God loves to work in amazing ways through the unlikely and the overlooked. It's easy for all of us to feel undervalued and unimportant, but that is exactly the type of person God will use. Think of the endless ways God could use you if you surrender to His will.

Actually Bethlehem did have some significance before Jesus' birth. Among other things it was also the birthplace of David, Israel's greatest Old Testament warrior and king. However, this is also another example of God's amazing province. David after all was the youngest son of Jesse who considered him the unlikeliest of his boys to become king. But God saw through all that and had him anointed the next ruler of Israel. Again God was working in ways that are outside of man's conventional wisdom.

We tend to see our life and circumstances through a man made perspective. Once we realize that the Lord works in mysterious ways which are far above our own we will be more ready for Him to use us in an exciting way.

Of course nothing has more significance than the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. How unlikely is it that it would begin one quiet, peaceful night in a quiet, peaceful town. The "everlasting Light", the "hopes and fears of all the years" all started in the "...Little Town of Bethlehem." You can't make this stuff up and thankfully it's not.

Questions: How have you seen God use seemingly insignificant people and events in your life or the lives of others? Have you ever felt overlooked? What effect has that had on you? What action will you take to allow God to use you in a significant way?



Go Tell It On The Mountain!

When lo! above the earth rang out the angels' chorus that hailed our Savior's birth.

"...I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."

Luke 2:10 NLT

The first time a woman finds out she is pregnant, she is filled with joy and searches for the best way to share the news with her husband, friends, and family. When a man is ready to propose marriage, he knows he has to find the right way to ask the question and share the news.

Words can sometimes fail to fully convey the truth of good news. So, when God was ready to bring Jesus into flesh on earth, how did He bring the Good News? In the greatest spectacle, "a vast host" of angels appeared to seemingly random shepherds in a middle-of-nowhere field. Holy light shone down and their voices rang out - it's the sort of blockbuster, showstopper you would expect for the greatest event in history. The only odd thing is the audience ("lowly" shepherds), and how few of them were probably there. Maybe that goes to show that no stone should be left unturned when we are sharing news like this.

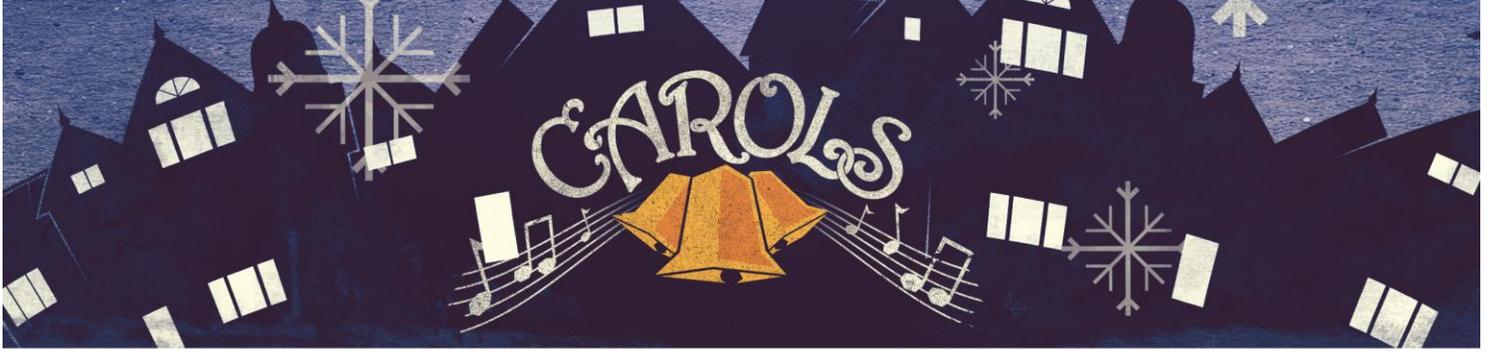
When Jesus began teaching, He did not spread the Good News by word alone. The blind received sight, the lame walked, and the dead were raised – all to communicate beyond words what the Good News meant.

Isaiah 62 shouted, "Tell the people of Israel, 'Look your Savior is coming.'" Jesus commanded the disciples to go to the ends of the earth. And in the classic spiritual, we are implored to "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere! Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!"

Questions:

Are you shouting out the Good News? Why or why not?

Is there a way for you to share the Good News in a more powerful way than through words?



Breath Of Heaven

*Breath of Heaven, Hold me together
Be forever near me, Breath of Heaven
Breath of Heaven, Light my darkness
Pour over me, your holiness, For you're holy
Breath of Heaven*

The LORD is my light and salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27:1 NIV

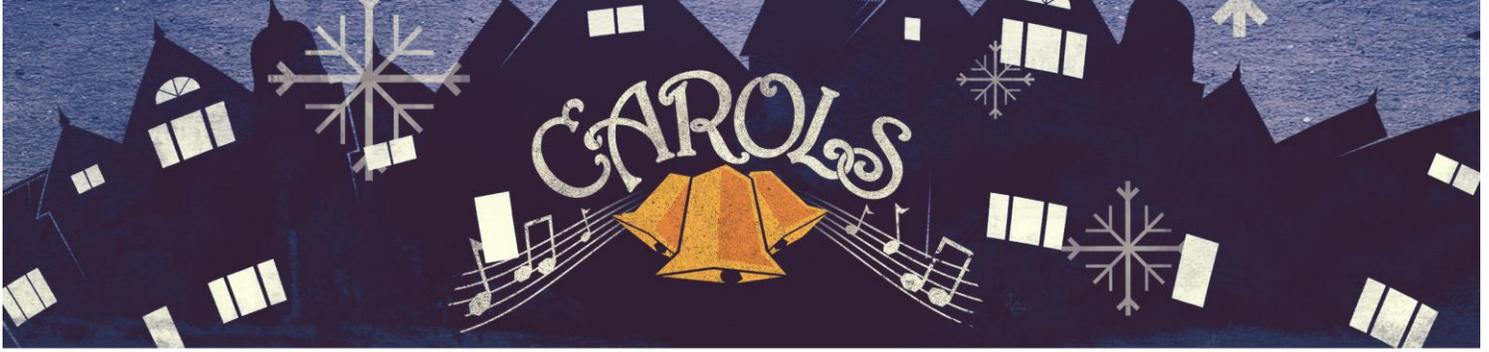
So many of us hold Mary, the mother of Jesus, in a very high esteem because she was chosen by God to carry His Son and bring Him into the world. It was the greatest task anyone has ever been given. Even though we hold Mary in high esteem, it's important to remember that she was a normal person just like us. In fact, she probably battled fear as much if not more so than most people. She was an unmarried teenager that found herself miraculously pregnant after an angel told her she would give birth to the Messiah. She was probably afraid of the great task that God had given her and dealt with fear from the backlash she and Joseph received because of the unique pregnancy. She was probably battled fear on their long journey to Jerusalem as she was nine months pregnant and taking a long journey on a donkey. Despite her fear, however, she remained faithful to God and the task they were given.

The song Breath of Heaven gives us a prayer that Mary most likely prayed asking God to hold her together, be near her, and to light her darkness. How many times have you prayed a similar prayer? Christmas is a joyous time, but the reality is that for many of us, it's hard to experience that joy in the midst of all the turmoil and trials that are happening around us. Just as God protected and guided Mary through a difficult time, allow Him to guide you this Christmas. Pray and share with Him what troubles your spirit and allow Him to restore the joy of Christmas within you by holding you together, being forever near you, and lighting your darkness.

Questions:

What trials are you enduring currently that's robbing you of the joy of Christmas?

What are some things you can do to reclaim joy and hope in your life?



Angels From The Realms Of Glory

*Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's
story, Now proclaim
Messiah's birth:
Come and worship,
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the
newborn King!*

*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.*

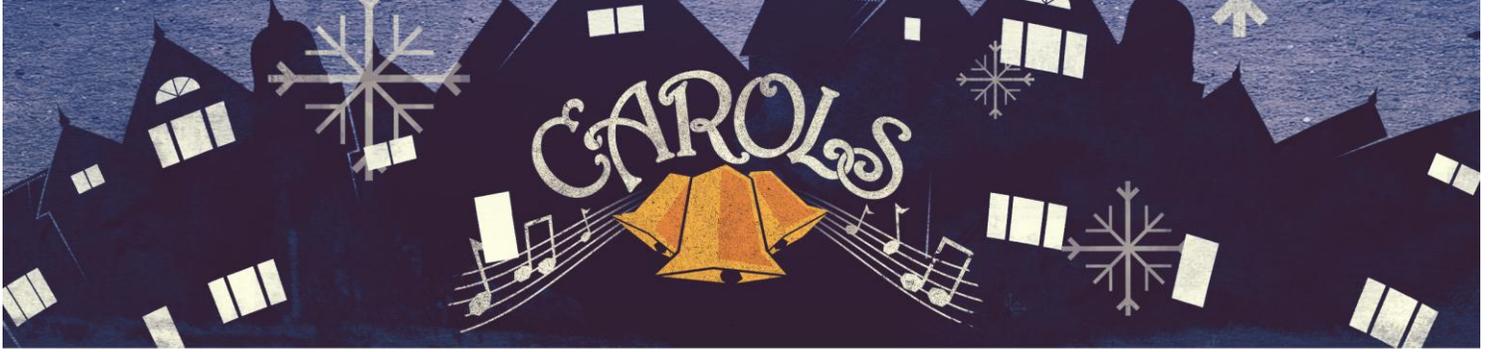
Luke 2:13-14 NIV

The actions of the angels are one of the most exciting aspects of the Christmas story from Luke 2. First you have the angel who suddenly appears to the shepherds to tell them the good news of Jesus birth (Luke 2:9). Then, as if the shepherds haven't had enough, there is a whole multitude of angels suddenly appearing in full concert to finish it off (Luke 2:13). This is such an epic celebration like nothing ever seen in the Bible, and it was displayed not for the government officials, the upper class of the city, or the spiritual elite, but for the lowly shepherds. What a beautiful tension and a perfect picture of the power of Christmas. It is the biggest news that mankind could ever know, its celebration is led by the very angels who hang out in the perfect presence of an all-powerful God, and the message is meant for the lowly and broken.

This old carol is such a simple but powerful reminder of all who have been invited to celebrate and to worship Jesus. Jesus is the most amazing gift given to us. God loved us so much that He sent His only son to enter humanity so that ultimately, we could have the chance to be right before a holy God. That is the power of Christmas, and the angels understood it. The shepherds experienced it first-hand. The wise men believed it. They not only joined the worship celebration, but their excitement and worship inspired others to do the same. This Christmas, let our worship would be so authentic and exciting that we would draw others to "Come and worship; come and worship; Worship Christ the newborn King!"

Questions: How can you celebrate and worship Jesus throughout this Christmas season?

How can you inspire others to do the same?



Silent Night

Glories stream from heaven afar. Heavenly hosts sing
Hallelujah! Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is
born!

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.”

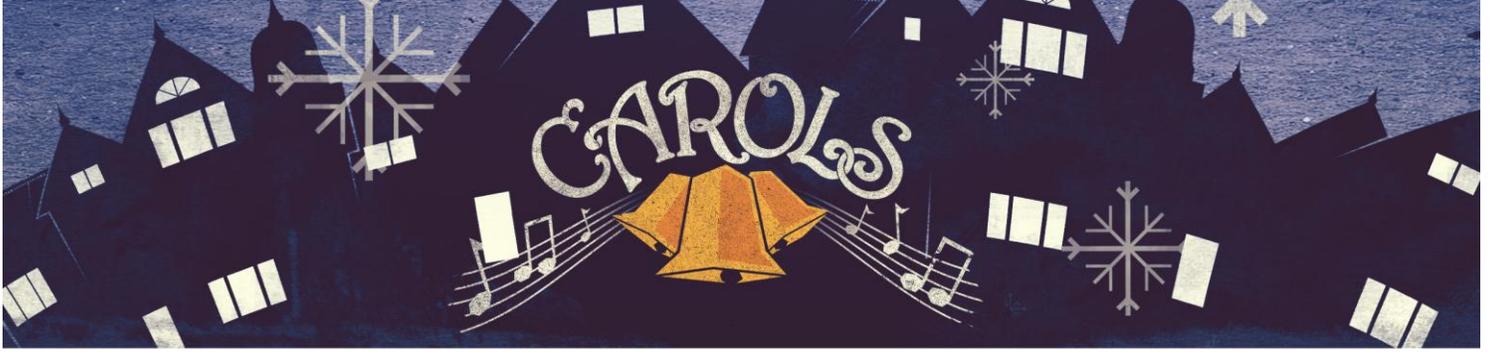
Jeremiah 23:5-6 NIV

When I was a child, we were poor. We rarely bought anything other than necessities throughout the year. About two months before Christmas, my parents asked me to write a list of all the things I wanted. I would pour through catalogs, to stores (before the internet) and dream about all the things I could possibly enjoy for the coming year. After my list was complete, I waited anxiously anticipating the gifts under the tree. The waiting felt like years, but it was worth the wait. Christmas morning was the best day! I spent the rest of the year enjoying my new toys!

God’s children, for hundreds of years, had anticipated the arrival of their Savior. Parents told their children of the coming King: The one who would save them all. Their kids told their kids. Everyone was anxiously awaiting the One they had heard about. The arrival of Jesus, their Savior, was a holy night. The heavens rejoiced. Angels sang. Shepherds quaked at the sight. At Christmas, we remember this day that heaven came to earth! The day God fulfilled His promise! The day God became man to redeem his children from a broken world. Your savior is here. He is present! You don’t have to anticipate something you already have. Celebrate. Enjoy the gift you have received!

Questions:

In what areas of your life are you waiting and anticipating God’s presence?



O Come, All Ye Faithful

*Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him*

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

Philippians 2:9-11 NIV

Adoration is a word that we love to use during the Christmas season thanks largely to the classic carol O Come, All Ye Faithful as we sing, "O come, let us adore Him." So many of us during the Christmas season spend more time thinking about Christ and giving Him adoration than any other time of the year. Think about it for a moment. More people go to church during Christmas than any other time of the year. We also tend to find ourselves singing and listening to songs about Jesus more during the Christmas season than any other time of year. As a result, Christmas is a time when we love to praise Him, honor Him, and adore Him much in the way Philippians 2:9-11 describes.

While it's great that Christ earns so much of our attention and adoration during Christmas, it's important to remember that we should pay that same amount of attention to Him 12 months a year instead of just one. Sure, it's easier to get caught up in all the Christmas hype and spend more time thinking, singing, praying, and adoring Christ during December, but in order to have a true relationship with Christ we must adore and spend time with Him daily and not just during Christmas. This year as you move out of the Christmas season and back into the normalcy of life, strive to find a way to capture that Christmas spirit that will enable you to adore Him and grow with Him every day of your life.

Questions:

What things keep you from adoring and spending time with Christ on a daily basis?

What steps will you take to ensure that you spend time daily with Christ?