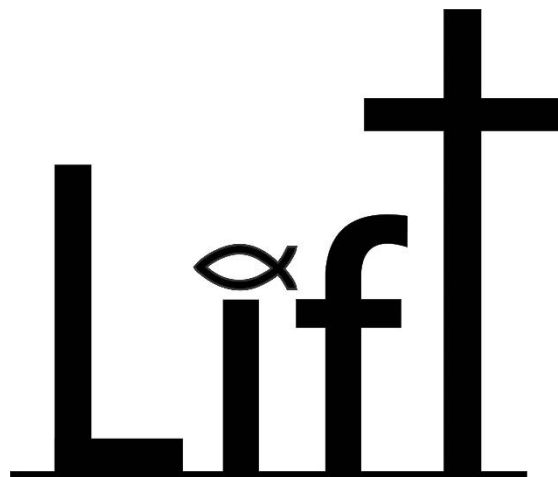


**HEAVEN AND  
NATURE SING:  
A LIFT  
DEVOTIONAL  
RESOURCE**



LIVING IN FAITH TOGETHER

[www.liftchurches.org](http://www.liftchurches.org)

## Introduction

I love an old song lyric from Stevie Wonder: “Music is a world within itself and a language we all understand.” I think that this is especially true with music the Christmas season. Songs and carols help us carry on the glorious story of Jesus’ birth. We join along with the heavenly host of angels as we sing glory to God in the highest.

If you are like me, hearing these songs brings up memories of moments in your life of faith and spiritual formation. Music becomes a part of our story and the soundtrack of our experience. I remember putting ornaments on our family Christmas tree in the living room as my mom’s scratchy old record of Dennis Day crooning holiday favorites in the background. I remember as a middle schooler mischievously chuckling that I got to sing the word “ass” in church with Good Christian Friends, Rejoice: “Ox and ass before him bow, and he is in the manger now.” After months of fasting from congregational singing in-person during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had a sense of hopeful togetherness when we were able to finally sing Silent Night by candlelight as an assembled community once again. As LIFT pastor, I have enjoyed playing guitar on *All Mundo Gozo Proclamad* and other carols in Spanish during Camino de Vida’s yearly posada celebration.

Advent is our time of preparation and anticipation as we get ready for Christmas. As we get ready for celebrations in both our homes and congregations, it’s also a time of reflection to think about what God is up to in our lives. We remember ancient voices calling us to prepare the way of the Lord. In silence, prayer, and scripture, we discover deeper meaning in our lives and experience. This Advent in the LIFT Parish, we have invited folks from our congregations to share some Advent thoughts about their favorite Christmas carols. This resource is an opportunity to get to know one another and ponder this season.

These writings are included in a printed booklet, but also shared through LIFT’s social media, using the hashtag #AdventLIFT. Also included each Sunday is a brief prayer for lighting an Advent wreath in your home. This set of four candles helps us feel the warmth of Christ as well as mark time as the weeks go by. My prayer is that the words in this devotional resource guide you in Christ’s love this Advent season and beyond.

Pastor Paul Bailie  
LIFT Pastor

## December 3: Advent Candle

**First Week of Advent:** *Use this blessing when lighting the first candle.*

Blessed are you, God of Jacob, for you promise to transform weapons of war into implements of planting and harvest and to teach us your way of peace; you promise that our night of sin is far gone and that your day of salvation is dawning.



As we light the first candle on this wreath, wake us from our sleep, wrap us in your light, empower us to live honorably, and guide us along your path of peace. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

## December 4: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

A favorite Christmas carol in our home (maybe more linked to the church season of Advent), is *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. I remember as a kid singing this hymn on Christmas Eve during traditional candlelight services. My childhood self wouldn't be able to explain it this way (My adult self still struggles to find the words)! But, there was always something about the rhythm and lyrics to this hymn that felt like a longing, even desperation, for divine hope and presence. It felt like a song sung out of our emptiness within, but a very good fullness was arriving, nearing, to heal all humanity and the earth. And the promise was so sure, there was a gentle permission the song was inviting us, even urging us to know – we could begin celebrating and rejoicing even now.

I think I was in seminary when I learned that portions of the lyrics to the hymn, originally written in Latin, date back to the 8th and 9th centuries. It's believed to have been sung amongst monastic communities centuries ago several days before Christmas. At the risk of sounding a little hokey... even today when we sing this carol, I sense something of the voices of saints from long ago singing with us.

We share in this same hope, longing, emptiness, and fullness of Emmanuel's arriving. And the promise is sure. Emmanuel shall come to you.

Pastor Matt Wheeler  
St. John's Lutheran Church

## December 5: In Heaven, In Heaven

On December 2, 1961, my parents, Raymond and Ruth Lull, took my sister and me to hear the Chapel Choir from Capital University. The sanctuary at St. John's was dark that evening, but the mood was festive. The voices of the choir filled the space with all manner of choral music.

The final selection of the evening was a German Christmas Carol, *In Heaven, In Heaven*. The lights dimmed and each choir member held a lighted candle. As their youthful voices blended together, my father reached for my hand and held it tightly. In my ten-year-old mind, we were hearing the song of the angels in heaven.

Not long after this evening, my father died. Christmastime was difficult without him. At Christmas Eve services at St. John's that year, Marian Tarris, the choir director, chose that beautiful carol for the evening anthem. As the youth and adult choirs sang, I could see my father celebrating in heaven, delighting in the angel's songs.

Since, I have loved this carol. For me it brings a few minutes of peace and love into our world. For a few minutes I am able to imagine what Christmas in heaven will be like.

In heaven, in heaven, it must be Christmastime.  
The stars twinkle merr'ly, so brightly they shine.  
O hundreds, and thousands, and more I can see.  
They bring me the message, that Christ is born for me.  
They bring me the message, that Christ is born for me.

In heaven, in heaven, there lives eternally,  
Our Christ Child in glory for angels to see.  
He brightens the Kingdom with His wonderous light,  
And hosts sing His praises on this, His holy night.  
And hosts sing His praises on this, His holy night.

Kathleen Seaton  
St. John's Lutheran Church

## December 6: From Heaven Above

When I was a seminary student on internship, during a worship planning meeting, our music director was lobbying hard to have the congregation sing “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” on Christmas Eve. It’s a beautiful German carol, written by Martin Luther himself, but not the most popular or well known. The musician had awesome gospel piano chops, but if he had his druthers, he would sing German chorales and motets all the time. The congregation was very diverse in so many ways, and the pastor was intentional and sensitive about having a balance of cultures represented in the music we used. So, she vetoed “From Heaven Above” for Christmas Eve. I admit I agree with her. The melody is a bit challenging to sing, and it has 14 verses.



That congregation also had a tradition of worship on Christmas day that started with an impromptu hymn sing. Being kind of informal, people shouted out names of carols they’d like. Because the congregation itself had people from many countries and with lots of travelers staying at a nearby hostel coming in for worship, the pastor invited anybody who wishes to share a song in their native language to do so. Then a woman from Tanzania, who had been attending worship while a graduate student at the law school, asked to sing a Christmas carol in Swahili. She was enthusiastically invited up front and began to sing. I don’t know Swahili, but I knew the tune. The music director looked over at me from his piano bench and said, “Look what our missionaries have done!”

Lutheranism is a worldwide faith movement. The countries of Tanzania, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Madagascar each have more Lutherans that we do in the ELCA. We are a part of something bigger than our own congregation. We are part of something bigger than LIFT. We are part of something bigger than the Northwestern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As Lutheran Christians, we are defined by our theology, not our culture. We don’t become Lutheran by eating Norwegian lefse or playing dartball. We become Lutheran by proclaiming the Good News of God’s love and grace through Jesus Christ.

Pastor Paul Bailie  
LIFT Pastor

## December 7: O Holy Night

My favorite Christmas carol, without a doubt, is *O Holy Night*. Whenever I hear this carol I get chills, especially when the person singing it gives every note the weight and the meaning it deserves. It reminds me of attending candlelight services as a child when our entire family would be together to worship. This song has such visual impact for me imagining the stars shining brightly, the hope on the faces of the weary rejoicing when Jesus appeared, and the sun rising to a glorious morning. I see all that were gathered falling to their knees, hearing the beautiful angel voices, and celebrating the most holy of nights, the night of our Savior's birth!

Colleen Carmack

St. Mark Lutheran Church

## December 8: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.*

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel* is one of my favorite Christmas hymns. Sure, it's not as joyous or fun as *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* but it is a Christmas hymn that helps me to keep this beloved season in perspective. The original song was written in Latin and dates back to the monastic days. Monks would sing this song in preparation and anticipation of Christmas. That's really what Christmas is all about, right?!? Preparation, expectation and anticipation. No I'm not talking about the long list of "to-do's," shopping list or even the expectation of giving and reviving the perfect gift. I'm talking about preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ. I'm talking about a longing for Christ to heal our brokenness and our world. I'm talking about expecting God to show up in our darkness, in our messiness, in our brokenness to offer us grace and healing. I'm talking about the mystery of faith: "Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again!" Yeah, we may have a lot to do before now and Christmas, and sure we all want our get togethers with family and friends to be, well, perfect. (Psss, they won't be) But deep down, in the darkness of our beating hearts, what we really want is to know God is near to us, that God loves us, and that God delivers us from the captors of sin and death. So rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, oh Israel.

Pastor Joshua Wynn

Hayes Memorial United Methodist Church

## December 9: Good Christian Friends, Rejoice

When this hymn is sung alongside other believing Christians, it makes my spirit come alive with joy. That we can freely proclaim to the world that the -long-awaited Messiah is here and has given us the gift of life.

Eugene Nehls  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church



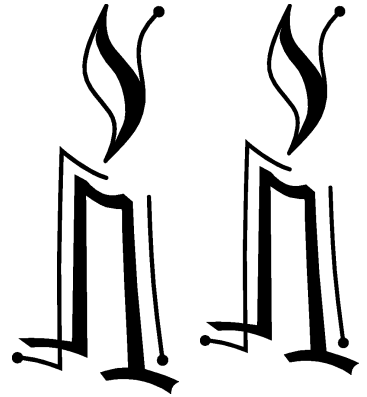
## December 10: Go Tell it on the Mountain

I don't remember how old I was, but Ms Nancy, our song leader, held up that jar of candy and I just knew that our class was going to win it that day. As farm kids we did not attend church regularly and Sunday School was not particularly my favorite. Dresses and singing were not my cup of tea. Plus, I could never remember the words. It seemed like everyone else knew them, while I was the kid clapping off beat. However, Go Tell it on the Mountain was easy and I knew the words to that song. I BELLOWED that chorus out at the top of my lungs and our class won the prize! Ever since, this song has had a special place in my heart.

This beloved childhood hymn has such great words, *“Over the hills and everywhere, go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ was born.”* Jesus wasn't born so that we could keep him a secret. He was not only meant to be talked about for one hour on Sunday. We are told to Go! Go out and shout it from the mountain tops and beyond! We can tend to keep our faith private. To stay quiet, and keep our faith to ourselves. Don't fret, we don't have to fear and tremble, like the shepherds. It is okay to talk about Jesus, to ask questions, and live out our faith beyond these walls of the church. Mark 16:15 tells us to Go! Go out into the world and share the gospel with all creation. We have a job to do! Go and shout it from the mountain tops! Jesus Christ our Savior was born!

Heather Hawn  
Grace Lutheran Church

**Second Week of Advent:** Use this blessing when lighting the first two candles.



Blessed are you, God of hope, for you promise to bring forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse who will bring justice to the poor, who will deliver the needy and crush the oppressor, who will stand as a signal of hope for all people.

As we light these candles, turn our wills to bear the fruit of repentance, transform our hearts to live in justice and harmony with one another, and fix our eyes on the root of Jesse, Jesus Christ, the hope of all nations.

O people of hope, come, let us rejoice in the faithfulness of the Lord. Amen.

## December 11: Away in a Manger

My Favorite Christmas Carol is *Away in a Manger*. Every time we sing this carol in church, I am reminded of my Primary Sunday School Christmas Program. We would walk into the church wearing our white robes, singing the verses to *Away in a Manger*.

Then years later, when my mother was in a nursing home, she asked the Christmas carolers to sing *Away in a Manger*. I was touched by these moments and that is why it has remained my favorite Christmas carol to this day.

Mary Lou Baker  
St. John's Lutheran Church





## December 12: 'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime



The melody of this carol, also called the Huron Carol, is haunting, the words are not traditional, and the author is a fascinating character. French Jesuit missionary Jean deBrebeuf had been sent to serve the native Huron tribes in the Sainte-Marie region of Canada. He spent most of his time in “New France” with the Huron Wendat [Wyandot] tribes in the St. Ignace region. He learned the Indians’ culture and language and taught the Indians the story of Jesus Christ, using concepts familiar to the tribes. Jean deBrebeuf – and three other Jesuit missionaries - died in 1649 when rival tribes slaughtered the Indians they were living with.

The English version of the “Huron Carol” was written in 1926 by Jesse Edgar Middleton, a Canadian historian, songwriter, and journalist. He used imagery from early 20 th – century French and English culture in translating deBrebeuf’s Huron language to English for the lyric. A direct translation from the Huron/Wendat language gives a joyful tone to the haunting melody of a traditional French folksong dating from about 1557:

“Have courage, humans. Jesus is born. The spirit that held us prisoner has fled, the spirit that corrupts our minds. The sky people are coming to say ‘be on top of life, rejoice! Mary has given birth – rejoice.’ Three great men are coming, led by a star. When they arrive, they praise him and greet him with respect, show him reverence. He comes to be compassionate with us.”

The original text of “The Huron Carol” is the reassuring Christmas story in fewer than 70 words.

Verna Young Carlo  
St. Mark

## December 13: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* is one of my favorite Christmas carols! Charles Wesley wrote this carol in 1739 and for the first 120 years, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* was sung to many different tunes. In 1856 William Cummings joined the lyrics with a tune written by Felix Mendelssohn for the Gutenberg Festival in 1840 to celebrate the introduction of printing. Who knew that such an ancient carol would still stir the hearts of people today!



Wesley meant the carol to be sung with jubilation and joy as we imagine both the church on earth singing with angels in heaven. Together we glorify Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Christ is the Savior of the world. When we sing *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* on Christmas Eve I personally feel the spirit fire up in me. Every verse proclaims the glory of the Lord.

In verse one we rejoice at the truth that God in Christ will reconcile all sinners throughout the world. This reminds me that Christ died for the sins of all humankind. Verses three and four lift up the prophesy of Isaiah who foretold the birth of a child from a virgin and his name will be Immanuel which means God with us. God comes to earth in the body of Jesus. I find comfort when singing verses five and six, that in the Prince of Peace I find my peace when life is chaotic. I am made righteous by the blood of Jesus and not by my own merit or works. When God looks at me, he sees me though Jesus and in Him I am righteous. I am humbled by this when I sing the words, "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."

Jesus chose to lay aside all the glory of heaven to come to this dark earth, to give his life on the cross and pay for the sins of all humankind so we can live again in heaven when our journey here is over. For me, all the power and majesty of Jesus the Christ is found

in the verses of *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* and this is why it is one of my favorite Christmas carols and why I sing it with jubilation and joy!

Maureen Pump

Lay Associate Minister/Synodically Authorized Minister

Grace Lutheran Church

## December 14: Lo How a Rose Ere Blooming

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing” (Isaiah 35:1-2)

Isaiah tells of a time of transformation. This is a land that has been ravaged by war and trampled by armies. The sand becomes a swimming pool. The haunt of jackals becomes a swamp. A desolate place becomes a place of growth, refreshment, and new life. The stench of decay has become the fragrant pollen of new growth. It's a brilliant bouquet of fresh flowers. The Tournament of Roses Parade marches through the Sahara. That which was wilderness has become a place of life. God's possibilities include respite in the wilderness.



In the cold of winter, we wait for springtime. During Advent, we await transformation in the world. This is God's doing. We wait for roses in the wilderness. It's a matter of already, but not yet. We long for the complete fulfillment of all that God has planned. This transformation God has planned is not just for the Earth, but for all of us. We live in the tension of the already, but not yet. With our nights half-spent, we want our roses in the winter. Like the ancient Israelites, we wait for the stream in the desert. We want to leap like a deer. We want the world as it should be, not the world as it is. We fervently pray every week, “Thy kingdom come and thy will be done.” We wait, we watch, and we pray. Yet joy seeps into our Advent wilderness. We have enough certainty of God's presence that we can celebrate a win before the game is over. We can sing freedom songs when we're not yet free. In our waiting and hoping, we trust in the God who comes and makes a way for us.

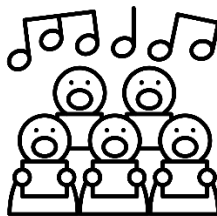
Pastor Paul Bailie

LIFT Pastor

## December 15

There is not one specific Christmas carol that is my favorite; rather, hearing pretty much any Christmas carol takes me back to when I was young and my family used to go to the Christmas Eve service at St. Paul in Clyde. They had a candlelight service, and it was always a treat to sit in the balcony listening to the choir sing and to hear the nativity story. I remember feeling so happy and excited because I knew when I woke up in the morning it would be Christmas. A few carols that especially bring back this memory are *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*, and of course, *Silent Night*. So I guess those would be my top 3. Hearing these carols also reminds me of how grateful I am that I was raised to know the true meaning of Christmas.

Karen Heater  
St. Mark Lutheran Church



## December 16: O Holy Night

Every line in *O Holy Night* stands out to me, as it is actually a history story of Christ's birth. I remember, every time I hear it, my son singing it in St. John's' and St. Mark's choirs. And, this was my favorite, and I think of him whenever I hear it.

My favorite memory of this hymn is from years ago, when the spouse of one of our pastors was singing *O Holy Night*. After he sang it, he bolted to the restroom. As I'm sure you can imagine, when he got there, he sat down and said in a loud voice, "Oh man!" He forgot to turn off his microphone and all present heard! This is true!

People at the time of Jesus' birth knew that he was coming. They all had faith he was coming, and it must have been like a huge weight was lifted when he arrived, and if we have faith—we too will see Jesus one day.

Sue Peck  
St. Mark Lutheran Church

## December 17: Angels We Have Heard on High

As an adult this is one of my favorite Christmas Hymns. This song is a celebration! You can't help, but join in the excitement. Glory to God in the Highest! Gloria in Excelsis Deo! The angels are singing and their overflowing joy is echoing off the mountain tops. The shepherds in jubilee! Have you ever been so excited for something that your joy is overflowing? Causing others around you to wonder what all the fuss is about? Growing up in the spring we would check the barn for new baby horses. I imagine a similar commotion coming from the stable. There are all sorts of people, everyone wants a chance to see.

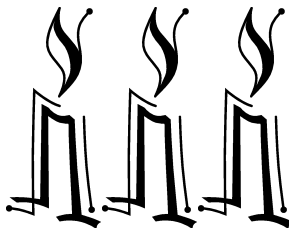
Then there is the letter O. It just can not contain itself, jumping up and down with excitement. Rising and falling in the chorus. It is praising God, and giving him the glory over and over again. All in one breath! There is just so much to be excited for. We have great expectations for this sweet baby Jesus, our future King sent to save the world! Join this infectious celebration, sing with great gladness! Come, Come and see what Jesus has to offer. Christ the Lord, the newborn King is here!

Heather Hawn  
Grace Lutheran Church

**Third Week of Advent:** *Use this blessing when lighting three candles.*

Blessed are you, God of might and majesty, for you promise to make the desert rejoice and blossom, to watch over the strangers, and to set the prisoners free. As we light these candles, satisfy our hunger with your good gifts, open our eyes to the great things you have done for us, and fill us with patience until the coming of the Lord Jesus.

O ransomed people of the Lord, come, let us travel on God's holy way and enter into Zion with singing. Amen.



## December 18: Go Tell it on the Mountain

My favorite Christmas carol is *Go Tell It On The Mountain*. I realized that I loved this carol in 1999, the year that I came "back to church," which in reality was coming back to Christ.

After being absent from worshipping and being selfish and thinking of only myself, I was again in church and when this song was the closing song, it was the first time that I cried over music.

It hit me so hard that I lost my breath and had to sit down. This had never happened to me before and I wondered what was going on. It was then that I realized it was the Holy Spirit that I was feeling.

As I listened to the words, it was as if I were in a time warp and the Spirit was telling me to proclaim the birth of Jesus, our savior.... The one everyone was waiting for to come. I mean, what news could ever be better than that?

OUR Savior is HERE!! He came to suffer unimaginable pain and to be hated just for being born, yet here He is! Here to save us, a little baby.... Born in a manger among the beasts of the barn, how can that be and what does it teach us?

It means to me, that no matter where you came from, there is a reason for YOU to be here. There is a reason for ME to be here, and while I am finding out what my mission is, I will GLADLY tell of our Lord and what He is all about. I will, of course, always have tears in my eyes when I speak of His Love for us, and each time I hear this exciting and jubilant song!

Michelle Englehart  
Trinity Lutheran Church

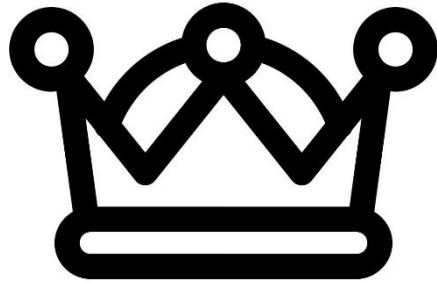


## December 19: Good King Wenceslas

I like the story the lyrics of *Good King Wenceslas* tell, especially the last few lines: “Heat was in the very sod where the saint [king] had printed. Therefore, Christian men, be sure while God’s gifts possessing, you who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing.”

The lyrics tell the story of the good king who sees a poor man gathering wood on a cold, snowy Feast of Stephen – December 26 – the second day of Christmas (celebrated in the British Isles as “Boxing Day,” a day for charitable giving). The king’s page tells him that the peasant lives far away; the king tells the page to gather meat, wine, and logs and join him in delivering the necessities to the peasant’s home. During the long journey, the December cold makes the page think he cannot walk the rest of the way. The king tells his page to “mark my [his] footsteps...boldly...and find the winter’s rage” less cold.

There really was a Wenceslas – Wenceslaus I, the Duke – or Prince – of Bohemia. He was born about 907 and died in 935. It was a divided family: the father’s side was Christian; the mother’s side was pagan. Wenceslaus followed the Christian way, but was killed by his pagan younger brother. During his short time in power, he demonstrated Christian values. Early biographies portrayed him as a righteous leader whose power arose from his piety. The title of King was bestowed on him by the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I (962 – 973).



In 1853 English clergyman John Mason Neale translated a Czech poem and set it to the tune of a 13th century carol. That carol was “Eastertime is Come,” published in a collection of Finnish songs in 1582.

The story behind this carol – and many others – shows that the story of Christ has come to us through many cultures over thousands of years.

Verna Young Carlo  
St. Mark Lutheran Church

## December 20: Angels We Have Heard on High

When we see angels in paintings and movies, they don't seem all that threatening. I've seen angels as chubby-cheeked, childlike cherubs. Nothing to be afraid of there. Just a friendly little kid.

In the classic film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, guardian angel Clarence Obody is a nice guy, a hard worker, trying to get wings. Not particularly scary.



In TV's *Touched by an Angel*, Tess is a sweet, grandmotherly angel. It's not like she's going to frighten you. It's more like she's going to hug you, sing to you, and bake you cookies.

A few years ago, I went to a live nativity event at a neighboring church. The actor playing the main angel was different from typical Christmas-pageant angels. He was big and commanding. It looked like he was a linebacker or point guard—or both. With a deep, booming voice, he exclaimed: FEAR NOT! I was rather startled myself.

It's easy to be startled. The shepherds are no different. These agricultural workers on the fringes of society receive a visit not from just one angel, but from a whole heavenly host—an angelic army. Their response is to go—go to Bethlehem and see the baby.

Like the spiritual says, “Rise up shepherd and follow.” They rise up from fear.

The shepherd's fear led them to the manger. The manger leads us to Jesus. Jesus leads us to fulfillment of God's love in Jesus' life death and resurrection. His resurrection leads us to new life. My prayer is that we, too, rise up from our fear. That we live out the message of Christmas this night and all year. From fear to celebration. From scarcity to abundance. From apathy to justice. From vengeance to peace.

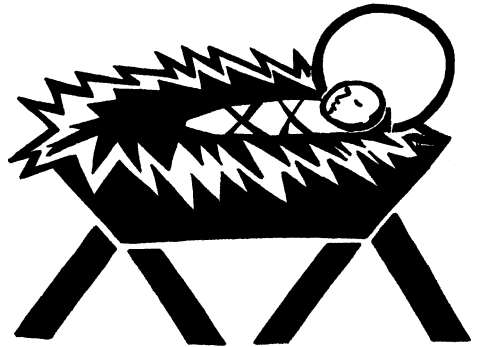
Pastor Paul Bailie  
LIFT Pastor



## December 21: Silent Night, Holy Night

*“The shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:16)*

I do cherish Christmas. Christmas doesn't always hold very good memories for some of us. Painful memories can quickly come to the surface this time of year. I hope though that Christmas might hold at least some good memories for you. And I do pray there would be a sense of hope for creating new and joyful memories for you, and for ones around you. As a kid, singing *Silent Night, Holy Night* with a candle in hand, late at night on Christmas Eve, worshiping with family and many others, I remember being in awe of God's presence as we sung together gathered for worship. The candlelight and the shadows, humming and singing together in the sanctuary, with all the artificial light turned off, in some way helped open me to knowing that God was very present with us. I'm sure that I was in my own little 'bubble' most of the time at Christmas as a kid. But on Christmas Eve, celebrating God climbing into our flesh and world, I felt as though I really was a part of Christ's family.



We are Christ's family. I think that's at least a part of the reason some of us have manger scenes decorating our homes and lawns this time of year. Mary and Joseph were wonderfully faithful, as the gospels describe. And yet, our own heart's desire a genuine love to be part of Christ's family, too. We can't solve all the world's problems. We can't heal all the world's pains and strains. We can't befriend every person in this world who is lonely, or fill every hungry stomach, or give shelter to every person who is without a house. Not all on our own. We do what we can. And together, we're a part of Christ's family. Christ, the True Host of this Holy Family, does seek to heal every ill, and fill every stomach, and shelters every person, and befriends every lonely soul...

With you as a member of Christ's Holy Family,

Pastor Matt Wheeler  
St. John's Lutheran Church

## December 22: I am so Glad Each Christmas Eve

I spent my growing up years in my hometown of Hendricks, a small village of 700 in Southwestern Minnesota, about a mile from the South Dakota border. Many residents of this village are descendants of Norwegians who emigrated in the late 1800's from the small town of Singsås, Norway, near the much larger city of Trondheim.

My father, born in 1909, grew up speaking Norwegian, but along with other members of the community for whom Norwegian was spoken at home, learned to speak English at school. Eventually the "American Language," as my dad often referred to it, became the norm.



But the normalization of speaking "American" did not diminish the love that members of my hometown community had for remembering and practicing their Norwegian heritage. A big part of that heritage at Christmas time was the singing of at least the first verse of a beloved Christmas Carol, *Jeg Er Så Glad Hver Julekveld*, composed in 1859, in Norwegian.

Today we know that carol by its English title, *I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve*. It is hymn 271 in the "red book," Evangelical Lutheran Worship, and 69 in the "green book," Lutheran Book of Worship.

When my brother Phil and I were kids, I remember when we were called on during church services and other gatherings during the Christmas season to stand and sing that first verse of this carol in Norwegian that our dad had taught us.

For me, the simple words of this carol describe the content, meaning and emotion of my Christmas observances, and so has become one of my favorites. The last verse puts it perfectly:

*And so I love each Christmas Eve, and I love Jesus, too.  
And that he loves me every day I know so well is true.*

Pastor Mark Bogen  
Grace Lutheran Church

## December 23: What Child is This

Many people wondered about this baby born of Mary. God chose to reveal this plan of forgiveness to individuals who are willing to accept his free gift of salvation. And we sing in joyful praise.

Eugene Nehls  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church



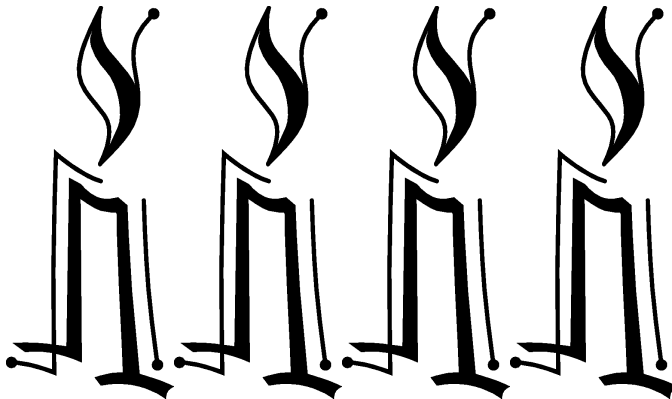
## December 24: Advent Candles

**Fourth Week of Advent:** *Use this blessing when lighting all four candles.*

Blessed are you, God of hosts, for you promised to send a son, Emmanuel, who brought your presence among us; and you promise through your Son Jesus to save us from our sin.

As we light these candles, turn again to us in mercy; strengthen our faith in the word spoken by your prophets; restore us and give us life that we may be saved.

O house of David, come, let us rejoice, for the Son of God, Emmanuel, comes to be with us.  
Amen.



## December 25: 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.*

Each family often has its own memories and traditions of Christmas dinner. What are yours? Discuss them with people you know. Maybe it is roasted ham or lambchops, or even a turducken. Maybe it is Finnish nissua or Mexican tamales. Maybe its Chinese food, like Ralphie's family has in the classic holiday movie, *A Christmas Story*. This year, how about bread and wine? Body and blood?

As Christians, week after week we share a Christmas dinner of Holy Communion. As we eat, we remember. We remember what God can do. We remember the child born in Bethlehem. The word "Bethlehem" literally means, in Hebrew, "House of Bread." We remember the good news the angels sang. We remember what the shepherds found when they went to Bethlehem. We remember the Bread of Life in that House of Bread.

As we eat our Christmas dinner at that table, we eat with hope of what God has promised. We live in a world where we don't always know what happens next. We live in a world that knows all too well fear and anticipation. We long for that peace. We pray for the coming of Christ. We celebrate, knowing that God has come to us. We remember the Bread. We eat the Bread. We live the Bread.

Pastor Paul Bailie

LIFT Pastor

