

Songs OF Hope

AN ADVENT READING GUIDE



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Advent 2017: Songs of Hope – Sing We Now of Christmas

HOPE

Sunday, Dec. 3:	Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence - <i>Robert Pendergraft, Assistant Professor, College of Business and Performing Arts</i>
Monday, Dec. 4:	Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus - <i>Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry</i>
Tuesday, Dec. 5:	O Come, O Come Emmanuel - <i>Dr. John Vassar, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs</i>
Wednesday, Dec. 6:	Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne - <i>Dr. Marty McMahon, Professor, McLane College of Business</i>
Thursday, Dec. 7:	Lo! How a Rose E'er Blooming - <i>Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry</i>
Friday, Dec. 8:	I Wonder as I Wander - <i>Jennifer Callaway, UMHB Student, BSM Core Team Leader</i>
Saturday, Dec. 9:	Go Tell It on the Mountain - <i>Tiffany Wurdemann, Director, Student Organizations</i>

LOVE

Sunday, Dec. 10:	Some Children See Him - <i>Dr. David Morgan, Adjunct Instructor, Christian Studies</i>
Monday, Dec. 11:	It Came Upon a Midnight Clear - <i>Karl Baker, Assistant Director, Baptist Student Ministry</i>
Tuesday, Dec. 12:	Away in a Manger - <i>Dr. Sharon Souter, Dean, Scott and White College of Nursing</i>
Wednesday, Dec. 13:	Angels from the Realms of Glory - <i>Dr. Brandon Skaggs, Vice President of Student Life</i>
Thursday, Dec. 14:	What Child is This - <i>Mary Catherine Carnes, Resident Director, Student Development/Residence Life</i>
Friday, Dec. 15:	Redeeming Love - <i>Sarah Harvey, UMHB Student, BSM Core Team Leader</i>
Saturday, Dec. 16:	Of the Father's Love Begotten - <i>Jen Jones, Director, Data Quality and Institutional Analytics</i>

JOY

Sunday, Dec. 17:	Joy to the World! - <i>Brian Street, Resident Director, Student Development/Residence Life</i>
Monday, Dec. 18:	While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night - <i>Robin and Regan Miller, UMHB Student Life</i>
Tuesday, Dec. 19:	How Great Our Joy - <i>Joey Mainini, UMHB Student, BSM Core Team Leader</i>
Wednesday, Dec. 20:	We Three Kings of Orient Are - <i>Dr. Michelle Reina, Associate Professor, McLane College of Business, UMHB Study Abroad Coordinator</i>
Thursday, Dec. 21:	As with Gladness Men of Old – <i>Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry</i>
Friday, Dec. 22:	O Come, All Ye Faithful - <i>Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor of Christian Studies</i>
Saturday, Dec. 23:	The First Noel – <i>Dr. Christi Emerson, Professor, College of Nursing</i>

PEACE

Sunday, Dec. 24:	Silent Night, Holy Night - <i>Dr. George Louterback, University Chaplain</i>
Monday, Dec. 25:	Hark the Herald Angels Sing - <i>Larry Locke, Associate Professor, McLane College of Business</i>



2017 UMHB Advent Guide

Songs of Hope

Sing We Now of Christmas

Songs have been around us, for us, and in us for ages. For example...

The Star Song:

“Upon what are its foundations founded? Or who laid its cornerstone;
when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”
~ Job 38:6, 7

The Mother’s Song:

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...” ~ Luke 1:46

Our Shared Song:

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with
all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God
with gratitude in your hearts.” ~ Colossians 3:16

The New Song:

“And they sang as it were a new song before the throne...” ~ Revelation 14:3

A life without song would be like food without flavor or a world without color. Songs carry and hold so much. If I want something truthful, beautiful, and good to stay in my soul, I do well to wrap it in a song. Somehow, words stick to tunes and tunes stick to words and I remember both better when they are attached to one another. If I want to really know something, I should sing it!

The songs of Christmas stir our hearts and strengthen ties to God and to one another. We celebrate the Greatest Story of All as we sing hymns and carols. These songs not only tell stories; they have stories. Each selection has its own history that deepens its meaning and significance.

These songs are among the riches of the Kingdom that are the legacies from those who have gone before us. They come from varied times, lands, and cultures. What they have in common is that they are gifts that help us unwrap The Gift of Jesus, God-with-us. I pray that the insights you read in the days ahead will add something fresh to the ancient story and quicken your knowing the One of whom we sing.

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry

Week 1

Hope



December 3

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

The Lord Is In His Holy Temple, Habakkuk 2:20

The text of “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” has for its source a 5th-century Eucharistic prayer from the church in Antioch and Jerusalem. Though often sung during the Advent season because of the explicit language of anticipation found in the opening stanza, the hymn is a complete picture of the gospel narrative; not only does Jesus Christ the Son come down, but God the Father remains above seated on his throne. The hymn calls for all creation to worship God in the heavens above and on the earth below.

Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

The opening stanza communicates the revelation and response aspect of worship as seen in the birth narrative: God comes down and reveals Himself to his people, in return He expects the honor and respect of His chosen people.

*King of Kings, yet born of Mary as of old on earth he stood.
Lord of lords, in human vesture—in the body and the blood.
He will give to all the faithful His own self for heavenly food*

The second stanza walks through Christ’s life and foreshadows His death. He is King, yet He was born of a virgin. He is Lord, yet He is fully man. That physical body will be sacrificed, yet will become spiritual food for His chosen people—Christ’s death and resurrection will make a way for His people to be present with Him for eternity.

*At His feet the six-winged seraph, cherubim, with sleepless eye,
veil their faces to the Presence, as with ceaseless voice they cry,
“Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, Lord most high!”*

The final stanza is a reminder that all creation in heaven and on earth will, as the prophet Isaiah writes, cry for all eternity “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3).

As we enter this season of Advent, let us remember that even though we look back to the time when Israel was anxiously waiting for the Messiah to come, we live in a time when Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again!

Dr. Robert Pendergraft, Assistant Professor, Department of Music



December 4

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Dear Desire of Every Nation, Haggai 2:7

Charles Wesley, the gifted Methodist hymn writer, was mindful of both the world around him and the Scriptures before him. In 1744 he noticed the plight of the orphans in England and the painful class divide in Great Britain. At that time, he was also considering the promise in Haggai 2:7:

⁷And I will shake all nations, and **the desire of all nations** shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

Wesley's pondering and praying led him to publish this prayer which he later developed into a hymn:

"Born Your people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever, now Your gracious kingdom bring.
By Your own eternal Spirit, rule in all our hearts alone;
by Your all sufficient merit, raise us to Your glorious throne. Amen."

In the full text of the hymn he wrote, Wesley declared Jesus to be:

"Israel's Strength and Consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart."

Wesley's intent was for people to remember and commemorate the arrival of Jesus and to prepare for His Second Coming.

Charles Spurgeon included sections of this hymn in his Christmas sermon of 1855. He made the point that very few are "born king," and that Jesus was the only one who was born king without first being a prince.

This hymn stirs anticipation in me! Anticipation looks ahead to what is coming, whether with dread or pleasure. When I anticipate something good, its goodness blesses me even before it comes to pass! In the case of Jesus's coming, the pleasure is great. I look back, up, and forward to see and adore The Desire of All Nations. Come, King Jesus, and fill our homes and hearts with your glory!

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry



December 5
O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Hope: Living in a Minor Key

O Come, O Come Emmanuel and Ransom Captive Israel.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel is a mournful carol sung in a minor key. This holy hymn contrasts and clashes with its other Christmas carol siblings. Like hope, this song fits poorly and beautifully in our world. A hopeful longing is something ancient Israel knew well. The Old Testament is an extended story of Hebrew captivity, bookended between their enslavements in Egypt and Babylon. The New Testament continues to narrate this story as the Gospels move from the cries from a manger to the cries from a cross.

Why write Christmas hymns in minor keys? During the joyous season of Advent, should we sing such songs? Is it possible to sing hopeful laments?

Our lives and songs today reflect the terrible tensions of that sacred first Christmas season. A far away child born far from home, far from modern comforts and far from safety. The arrival of the Christ occurred in a sacred homeland under imperial domination; it included perilous flights for a new born family, and the advent events were accompanied by the bitter soundtrack of Rachel weeping. Throughout this first nativity, Mary pondered all of these things in her heart.

We sing these songs as a reminder that life is not yet where it should be, that we are not alone and that kingdom justice is not yet come. The truest sense of the Christmas season acknowledges that we live our lives in minor keys, and that these discordant tones tumble together to form a powerful melody. Christmas carols in minor keys are a resonance and a reminder that all is not as it should be. We ponder these tensions in our own hearts. This song lingers long after it is sung and it reminds us that hope is ever on the move.

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

Dr. John S. Vassar, Provost, Academic Affairs



December 6

Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne

Is There Room?

“Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne” is not exactly a common Christmas hymn. We certainly don’t hear it while walking through the mall. In truth, we really don’t sing it a lot in church. The uneven rhythm of the song probably contributes to that. It’s musical “hook” is not as strong as many hymns.

The song plays off one of the most common themes of the Christmas story—no room in the inn. From a Christmas perspective, that is the “normal” element of the hymn. It isn’t a very common Christmas hymn, though. It is a much bigger story. Emily Elliot, the author, wrote the song for the children’s choir of her father’s church in Brighton, England. Her goal seems to have been to connect the nativity story to Jesus’ larger life and ministry—going from the manger to the desert to the cross, and finally to his triumphant return.

While the song references several New Testament stories, it’s real foundation seems to be one of the original great hymns of the church: Philippians 2:5-11. Referring to Jesus, Paul says

Who, being in very nature God,
Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
But made himself nothing,
Taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness
And being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled himself
And became obedient to death—even death on a cross.

It is the servant Jesus that lies at the foundation of this hymn. The God who chose to step down. The God who chose to become a helpless babe. The God who gave up everything. The God who served. The God who humbled Himself. The God who died for us. The God who is worthy of worship.

That Jesus is the one whom we honor with this hymn. The most powerful twist of the hymn is the play Elliot makes on the “no room at the inn” theme. The hymn reminds us that Jesus was often on the outside, but it also calls us to something more. The refrain of the hymn lays down the challenge “come to my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for thee.” Amen, come Lord Jesus.

Dr. Marty McMahon, Professor, McLane College of Business



December 7

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

A Branch Will Bear Fruit, Isaiah 11: 1

I cannot think of *Lo! How a Rose E'er Blooming* without going back to Christmas Eve services in an old stone church in my hometown. The words and melody draw me to Jesus through things I can see and feel. The carol engages my senses...

**Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.**

I see the Rose, picturing its color, imagining its soft petals and sharp thorns. I can almost smell it. I feel the cold of winter. I am up and watching on that half-spent night.

The song takes me back further than years of Christmas Eve services. Way back. Centuries. To the prophet Isaiah describing the origin and character of One who was to come:

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD.” ~Isaiah 11:1, 2

The imagery and impact of the carol highlight the attractiveness of Jesus.

**This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere;
True Man, yet very God, from sin and death He saves us,
And lightens every load.**

He is so very lovely. And so very good! He changes all around Him with His scent and light. He also changes us as He saves us and lightens our load. He even changes me.

The text was written by an anonymous author in the sixteenth century. It functions like a parable as it starts with something familiar—a Rose—and unfolds something larger, longer, and deeper—the Flower gift of God, given and received. Living! Lovely! Precious!

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Baptist Student Ministry Director



December 8

I Wonder as I Wander

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.
When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.
If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heaven for to sing,
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.

This hymn calls all believers to recognize both the humility and power of the King. He was born into a world that didn't make room for Him. He uttered His first cry, surrounded not by kings but by the lowliest of creatures. Yet, we often forget that Jesus the baby was still Jesus the King. God the Son did not lose His power; rather, He decided to set it aside for a time, fully capable of taking it back up again.

He deserves to be praised. He deserves to be glorified. As Christmas draws near, do not forget that the innocent babe swaddled in white is also a King who stooped down from His throne to take on the sins of the world. He is worthy. He deserves to be praised. He deserves to be glorified.

Jennifer Callaway, UMHB Student BSM Core Leader



December 9

Go Tell it on the Mountain

Bring the Good News, Luke 2:10-14

John Wesley Work, Jr. is said to be the original composer of *Go Tell it on the Mountain* dating back to 1865. Further research states the song is considered to be an African-American spiritual song that was passed down orally from plantation to plantation. John had a passion for music and was inspired to collect the songs and put them together in a songbook. It has been considered a Christmas carol because the original lyrics celebrate the birth of Christ.

This song was one of my favorites growing up because our Sunday school teacher let us shout from the top of our lungs “Jesus Christ was born”.

Over six years ago I found out my sister was pregnant. It would be the first grandchild of our family, so you can imagine the excitement. Nine months of anticipation wondering: what will this child be like, who will she take after, what will her name be. Then one day I got the call that she was having the baby, my niece named Aurora. I wanted to tell everyone, and I did.

Six years have gone by and I have stopped telling people about her birth. It is not “news” anymore. But I do tell them about what swimming class she is in, or recent books she has read. I tell them how she loves bigger than anyone in our family. I tell them what she is up to lately.

When we think of the birth of Jesus, sometimes because of growing up in the church, we consider it to be old news. We even sing the songs but forget the weight of the meaning behind it. But what about the things Christ has done in our life recently? What about the grace he has given us with our family, or the ways he has provided for us this week. Each thing is news worthy and we should not take it for granted.

There are people in all of our lives who have not heard that Jesus Christ was born. Imagine generations of anticipation of the birth of Christ and it finally happens. Imagine being the shepherd in the fields on an average night and an angel appears letting you know this highly anticipated event has occurred and it's time to celebrate and tell your friends. This advent season, take time to reflect on the good news from Christ's birth to what He has done for you lately and “go tell it on the mountain.”

Tiffany Wurdemann, Director of Student Organizations

Week 2

Love



December 10

Some Children See Him

Several years ago, I came across “Some Children See Him” by chance or accident as I was researching visuals for the New Testament class that all UMHB students must take. I don’t recall the particulars, but I was seeking images that would illustrate that each Gospel emphasizes a different aspect of Jesus. What I found was a video of James Taylor singing “Some Children See Him.” [Taking four to five minutes to watch would be helpful.](#)

When I began to explore more about this carol, I discovered that Albert Burt composed the tune and Wilha Huston, organist for his father’s church, wrote the words. Burt was an American jazz musician who continued the practice of his father, an Episcopal priest, who would send an original Christmas carol each year to family members and congregants. Albert’s father began the tradition in 1920 and, in 1942, asked his son to take over as composer. They worked together until 1948 when the elder Burt died of a heart attack. Albert continued to write what has become known as the “Albert Burt Carols” until he died of lung cancer in 1954. He wrote fifteen carols in all and completed his last, “The Star Carol,” two days before his death. It’s worth a listen as well.

Sixty-six years have passed since Burt-Hutson wrote “Some Children See Him” for the 1951 Christmas card. It reveals a racial inclusiveness that was unusual for that day, three years prior to the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision that determined that separate was inherently unequal.

Some people (mistakenly) believe that Christians ought to be color-blind. “Some Children See Him” counters by reminding us that God created a colorful humanity. Relish that diversity.

We each see Jesus through a lens of our own making. Maybe we should see Jesus through a lens of his teaching. The Gospel text for Reign of Christ Sunday on this year’s liturgical calendar (November 26) was Matthew 25:31-46. Verse 40 stands out: “And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’” (NRSV). For God’s people to feed the hungry, care for the sick, offer hospitality to the stranger is to minister to Jesus. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to [the “lily white,” the “bronzed and brown,” “the almond-eyed,” and the “dark as they”], you did it to me.

Dr. David Morgan, Adjunct Instructor, Christian Studies



December 11

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

*“Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven’s all-gracious King.”
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.*

*And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.*

The world is full of many messages and songs. The rhythms and cadences of voices, calls, and requests fill our ears. Every day is a struggle to sort, organize, and evaluate what to consider, what to discard, and what to hold as true. Through all the chaos and confusion, our hearts and minds long for a better story. We all want something beautiful, good, and true to ring out and grab our ears.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear is a retelling of the old story of the angels announcing the presence of Jesus the King. Their message and song ring out to proclaim a better story. Peace has come crashing into the world in an unexpected and profound way. The hymn writer, while retelling this story, beckons us to consider our world today. When we are at strife with one another, we are not listening to the message of the angels. We are incapable of hearing the love-song’s melody. We cannot be at war and seek goodwill to men. We cannot be divisive and follow the way of Jesus the King.

Are we listening? Can we even listen? War and strife no longer have a place since “heaven’s all-gracious King” has come. So let us lay down our weapons, lay down our vindictive and retributive natures, lay down our egos and defensiveness. In a world continually bent toward shouting and violence, let us “hush the noise” and listen.

Peace came through Jesus. Peace continues to come through Jesus. Peace will always come through Jesus. Let it be so in our lives this season and all the seasons to come.

Karl Baker, Assistant Director, Baptist Student Ministry



December 12

Away in a Manger

In 1887, American hymn writer James R. Murray entitled the tune to “Away in a Manger” as “Luther’s Cradle Hymn.” Murray further stated ...that Martin Luther had not only written “Away in a Manger,” but had sung it to his children each night before bed. As the song spread across a growing America and people began to sing it at home, in churches, and at schools, they often envisioned legions of German mothers rocking their babies to sleep each night with the strains of “Away in a Manger.”

Collins goes on to write that the song was probably written in the mid-1800s by an anonymous American. The tune was composed by J. E. Clark. A man named Charles Hutchinson Gabriel, music director for Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, published a new version of the hymn that included the third verse. The legend of the song being written by Luther continued to grow as passing decades brought in the new century” (<https://bibleheartburn.com/2013/12/11/the-story-behind-away-in-a-manger/>).

He said “Although we may never know who wrote the song we can still find inspiration in the story of the song itself. It tells us of the incredible humble birth of the greatest man who ever lived.”

My granddaughters are six and three. They can both sing (on tune) all of the first verse of *Away in a Manger*. I asked them what it meant that Jesus had no crib for a bed. Haley said Mary and Joseph did not have money so they could not buy a crib. Well, she was somewhat right. There was no money, and there was no room... only a stable... only a bed of hay. I love nativity scenes that picture the cows and lambs and horses around the baby in the 'manger.' A *manger*, by definition, is a long box that held the feed for horses and cattle. It was not very clean, probably did not smell the best and, more than likely, was full of animal drool. Yet God placed His Son, the Savior of the world, here.

Throughout all of His life, Jesus took the humble way. He had humble friends, ministered to humble people, faced a devastating humbled death and yet in Philippians 2:10 God said...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Most of us can use a bit of humility during the Christmas season. Perhaps as we sing, “Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay, Close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care, And take us to heaven, to live with Thee there...” perhaps we will pause and remember the reason for the season.

Dr. Sharon Souter, Dean, Scott and White College of Nursing



December 13
Angels from the Realms of Glory
Luke 2:13-14; Haggai 2:7

Written by Scots-Irish poet, James Montgomery, on Christmas Eve 1816. Montgomery, son of Irish Moravian missionaries, spent much of his life writing poetry and stories. When he was five years old, his parents left Scotland to serve on the mission field of the West Indies. Young James didn't know that would be the last time he would see his parents as they died on the mission field. Many of his younger writings were about his loneliness and faith.

Montgomery spent his years writing and became a voice and advocate for seditious causes such as abolition of slavery and freedom from Great Britain. While throughout his life, Montgomery drifted from his faith, as he matured he came back to his Moravian roots and faith. On December 24, 1816, rather than writing pro-Irish rhetoric to inspire a revolt against the British, Montgomery reached out to bring everyone together, penning a poetic story of angels proclaiming the birth of the Savior for all people- Irish and English, poor and rich, Anglican and Moravian.

Montgomery's beautiful words ring true even today. While many times our world may seem more divided than ever, Montgomery's words remind us that God is sovereign over all. His words remind us of God's power to bring all nations together to sing of His praises, and to worship God- the Father, Spirit, and Son.

As Montgomery so beautifully penned, God commanded the angels to turn their voices from the creation story to the Messiah's birth. At the same time, He commands us to leave our concerns or complementation, to come together as all nations to

Come and worship

Come and worship,

Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Dr. Brandon Skaggs, Vice President for Student Life



December 14
What Child is This?
Luke 2

Wonder. Amazement. Reverence. This song evokes all these emotions in me. The music is almost mournful, yet filled with so much hope. William Chatterton Dix, the author of *What Child is This*, was a businessman when this song was published in 1865. The song was derived from a longer poem entitled, *The Manger Song*, and set to the tune of *Greensleeves*, a familiar tune of the time.

For all of the years I have heard and sung this song, the third stanza was unfamiliar to me:

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail, the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

It's amazing how we can sing of the wondrous event of Jesus' birth and still look ahead to the cross. But we do. The story of God becoming a man is incomplete without looking forward to the cross and resurrection of Jesus. I need that reminder, especially at Christmas. It's so easy for me to be swept up in the "sweet" picture of the nativity scene and not remember why Jesus came. Me. You. My sin. Your sin. He came to pay the price on our behalf. And now I'm back to wonder, amazement, and reverence! In light of this, I think I'll be singing this last stanza a little more loudly and joyfully this year:

Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Mary Catherine Carnes, Resident Director-Burt Hall, Residence Life



December 15

Redeeming Love

*“Redeeming love, a love that knows no limit;
Redeeming love, a love that never dies;
My soul shall sing through-out the endless ages
With choirs extolling this great love on high.”*

The hymn “Redeeming Love,” tells a story of hope and the deep love of Christ. From his birth to his death, our Lord’s charge was one of such love. The song leaves us with our own declaration to spend all our days praising a holy God - a God whose love knows no bounds.

I am reminded of the commandment in John 13, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” As the hymn sings of the Father’s great love, we are reminded to love our neighbors with the same selflessness. As Christ came as a child, we love with the full abandon of children. A song to be sung through the ages.

My charge to you is one of reflection - meditate on how great the love of the Lord is. Let the knowledge of His love propel you to love those around you the same. Be an example of His redeeming love.

If you have the opportunity, [listen to this rendition of the hymn](#) and rest in the Son’s great love for you.

Sarah Harvey, UMHB Student, BSM Core Leader



December 16

Of the Father's Love Begotten

“I am the Alpha and the Omega” – Rev. 22:13

Of the Father's Love Begotten has long been one of my favorite hymns, but until a few weeks ago, I knew nothing of its history. When I researched it, I found that Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius wrote it in the 5th century as a poem. Prudentius was considered the greatest Christian poet of his time. So the poem has been around for ages, but it wasn't actually translated and set to music until the 1800s by a man named J. M. Neale. Neale spoke 20 languages and was known for his translations of Greek and Latin hymns.

The thing I've always loved most about this hymn is its haunting melody, the way it curls around itself. So imagine my delight to find that the tune is the “Divinum Mysterium” or Divine Mystery. What a fitting melody for this text! The tune isn't quite as old as the poem, but it is from the 13th century.

So this beautiful poem about how Christ was born of God's great love for us was written 1600 years ago. And it was set to a melody from 800 years ago. And about 170 years ago, a couple of verses were added as a Doxology by a man named Henry Williams Baker. And today, we continue to sing these words:

*Of the Father's love begotten
'Ere the worlds began to be.
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending He.
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.*

This hymn reminds me that God's love is never-ending, that He is the creator of all that is and all that will be, and that He loved us so much that He sent His son to redeem us. Even the title tells us that Jesus came *from love to be love*.

And the last line that repeats in every verse: *Evermore and evermore*. I love that this is one of the oldest hymns in our hymnal and that it still resonates today. I am sure it will continue to touch hearts and shine the light of the Father's love for years and years to come.

Let no tongue on earth be silent, Every voice in concert ring, Evermore and evermore.

Jen Jones, Director, Data Quality & Institutional Analytics

Week 3

Joy



December 17

Joy to the World!

Psalm 98

Joy to the World! has been one of my favorite Christmas hymns for as long as I remember. It is one of the songs that everybody knows, believer or nonbeliever. Whether in a group or by yourself, sometimes you cannot help but sing along whenever you hear it played. Maybe it is just easy to sing or maybe it is just one of those songs that can be sung in groups (as I thought as a kid) and nobody cares if you sing badly. I never got that vibe with other songs like *O Holy Night* or *Silent Night*.

For a long time when I thought about the song, I thought it was celebrating the birth of Jesus, which it is, but it is much more than saying, “Yea! Baby Jesus is here!” I was reading the 98th Psalm one day and came across this:

“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn-
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.”

The word *joy* is interpreted a myriad of ways. It means many things to people. One of the meanings of joy is elation. We should have feelings of elation regarding the birth of Jesus, but that is only half the story; I think this beloved hymn is referencing both the birth of Jesus and His return. This passage and scripture helped me realize this. If you were to read or sing through the lyrics of the song with the return of Jesus in mind, it is possible you can see it from a different perspective.

This time of year is certainly a time to celebrate the birth of our Savior! It is a momentous occasion most worthy of celebration. What if we considered reflecting on Christmas with both sides of the story in mind? Would our mindset be different? Would we cherish our time with loved ones in a different way? Would we look at the gifts we give or receive in a different way? Consider these questions this season as we reflect on not only the reason for the season, but also the *reasons* for the season.

Brian Street, Resident Director, Student Life



December 18

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night

Luke 2:8-14

The Song

With beautiful poetic verse, Nahum Tate crafted his words into a biblically-based, word-portrait of Luke's account. His work appeared in print as poetry in 1702. As was common, the poetry was then set to music. This particular carol has been supported by two different tunes over time, both of which many church hymnals include to this day.

The Scene

Stanza one sets the scene with shepherds, out in the field, working the night shift, minding their own business, literally. God's messenger arrived accompanied by the glory of the Lord. This "Glory" being the brightest illuminating force they had ever encountered. It is an understanding messenger who began such a discourse with, "Fear not!"

Second and third stanzas: "'Fear not' said he (for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind). 'Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind. To you in David's town this day is born of David's line a savior, who is Christ the Lord; and this shall be the sign;'"

The Message

Good News for each of them, and for ALL people -- every person of every nation, tribe, people and language! This Good News was a fulfillment of the promise made to Joseph and Mary that they would give birth to son, and he would save his people from their sin. For all who would believe this and trust in this Savior would be reconciled to God; thus, there would be "peace among those with whom he is pleased." Later the apostle Paul would write, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Those of us who follow this Savior have experienced His forgiveness, and walk daily in the peace of God because we have peace with God. Therefore, we can wholeheartedly join in the words of the sixth and final stanza:

"All glory be to God on high and to the earth be peace;
Good will henceforth from heaven to men begin and never cease."

Regan & Robin Miller, UMHB, Student Life



December 19

How Great Our Joy

A Promise

*“There shall be born, so he did say,
in Bethlehem a child today.*

How great our joy!

*There shall the child lie in a stall,
this child who shall redeem us all.*

How great our joy!

*This gift of God we'll cherish well,
that ever joy our hearts shall fill.*

*How great our joy!
Great our joy
Joy, joy, joy”*

This past semester has been filled with destruction, pain, and loss for many students. In seasons of pain, joy can feel like an impossible goal. We hear this word passed around as if it is an emotion to be caught, like a ball. Is it something that we can only have for a moment before we have to pass it to another? That is not the joy that we sing of in this hymn.

Joy is God fulfilling His promises.

How great our joy in knowing that God has fulfilled His promises to us through the life of Jesus, as He said. How great our joy in knowing that this Jesus would sacrifice Himself so we can have new life, as He said.

Joy is everlasting because God fulfilled His promise and continues to fulfill promises. In the midst of the darkest days, there is joy in knowing that God is faithful to the end to do and be exactly what He said.

Joey Mainini, UMHB Student, BSM Core Leader



December 20

We Three Kings of Orient Are

Matthew 2:1-12

Memories of the Christmas season.....filling your shoes with straw and putting them on the windowsill; waiting anxiously for the kings to bring you candy and a gift; King's Day cake and being "king" for a day. Sound familiar? If you grew up in the United States, this probably doesn't sound like any of your Christmas memories. You likely remember cookies and milk and Santa instead. However, for many children who grow up in Latin America or Spain, hay in your shoes and the coming of the kings is more common than cookies and Santa. The holiday we know as Epiphany is Tres Reyes (Three Kings) or Día de los Reyes in Latin America. As part of the celebration, children put hay in their shoes for the camels on the night before Tres Reyes. In the morning, the hay is gone, and the Three Kings have left them candy and gifts in their shoes. The tradition reminds families of the journey of the Wise Men and the gifts they brought Jesus.

Matthew 2:11 *And when they (the Magi) were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.*

Matthew doesn't tell us how many wise men there were, exactly where they came from, how they traveled, or even that they were kings. These "facts" are all part of tradition. Matthew's telling of the Wise Men's visit inspired Rev. John Henry Hopkins Jr. to write the popular carol *We Three Kings of Orient Are* as part of a Christmas Pageant in 1857. At the time, Rev. Hopkins was teaching music at General Theological Seminary in New York. It's unique that he wrote both the music and the lyrics. This was not common at the time. It's also a uniquely American carol – and became one of the most popular Christmas carols to be composed in the U.S.

While this carol doesn't remind me of shoes, hay, or gifts from my childhood, it does remind me of what a precious gift Jesus is to us. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were the Magi's valuable and symbolic gifts to Jesus, but Jesus is God's gift to us. May you be reminded of what a precious gift He is to you this Christmas season!

*We three kings of Orient are bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, Following yonder star.
Born a king on Bethlehem's plain, Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never, Over us all to reign.*

*Dr. Michelle Reina, Associate Professor, McLane College of Business;
UMHB Study Abroad Coordinator*



December 21
As with Gladness Men of Old
The Magi Visit Jesus, Matthew 2:1-12

William Chatterton Dix was ill and in bed on January 6th, 1859. He was too sick to work, but not too sick to read. For diversion, he read the scripture selection for the day. It was Epiphany, and the text was the story of the Magi's visit to the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:1-12).

He had time to rest and to think, and the story kept running through his mind. As he dozed and woke, and these verses took shape in his thoughts. By the end of the day, the hymn was complete. (Dix was ill for an extended time, and wrote several hymns in a similar manner, including *What Child is This*.)

Dix was the son of a surgeon, a layman and an author. Not a clergyman. Some writers wonder if he identified with the Magi as outsiders. They were Gentiles entering into a very Jewish story. Once strangers to the covenant, they were now included in the story of God's great love revealed in Jesus.

The Magi's actions and manner are admirable and exemplary. They are worthy of imitation.

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold
As with joy they hailed its light
Leading onward, beaming bright
So most gracious God may we
Evermore be led by Thee

As with joyful steps they sped
To that lowly manger bed
There to bend the knee before
Him whom heav'n and earth adore
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek Thy mercy seat

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare
So may we with holy joy
Pure and free from sin's alloy
All our costliest treasures bring
Christ to Thee, our heav'nly King

They gladly follow God's leadership. So may we. They joyfully find their way to Jesus and bow in worship. So may we. They offer costly treasures to the child. So may we.

So may we. So may we.

Dr. Shawn Shannon, Director, Baptist Student Ministry



December 22

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Adeste fideles læti triumphantes,
O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
Venite, venite in Bethlehem.
Come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
Natum videte
Come and behold him
Regem angelorum:
Born the King of angels
Venite adoremus (3×)
O come, let us adore him.
Dominum
Christ, the Lord

When I sing this old carol, my thoughts go back to the many times I have joined with a group singing “O come let us adore him” in candle-lit sanctuaries or caroling outside someone’s home, beckoning all to worship Jesus. *Adeste Fideles* (lit. “be present you faithful”) is one of those songs through which Christmas comes alive for me.

What makes this hymn so memorable is its simplicity – a simple call to worship Christ. No one is completely sure who authored the hymn. Originally written in Latin, the hymn has been attributed to various writers, most often to John Francis Wade ca. 1743. Yet the provenance of this hymn is not as important as what the words communicate and what the music accomplishes.

When people sing “O come, all ye faithful,” the words evoke in us the meaning they express. We **come**, we **behold**, and we **adore** Christ the Lord!

Dr. Bill Carrell, Professor of Christian Studies



December 23

The First Noël

Finding Joy in Humble Beginnings

The French word Noël refers to Christmas or a Christmas carol. Noël is believed to be derived from the Old French term nœl, with Latin roots in the term natalis, meaning birth.

This beautiful hymn captures the first moments in which the Good News was proclaimed. Not to kings...not to holy men...but to humble shepherds. They were tending their sheep and likely concerned about keeping warm. Were they sharing scriptures of old about the coming Messiah? Were they speaking in hushed voices about the promised hope of redemption?

Luke 2:9 says, “And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.”

How indescribable it must have been to behold the “glory of the Lord” as expressed by angles heralding the arrival of the King of Kings! Astonishing and terrifying all at once. Yet, the angel goes on to say, “Do not be afraid! For I bring you good tidings of great **joy!**” And the proclamation is followed by a heavenly host proclaiming, “Glory to God in the highest! And peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased!”

Joy and peace seem elusive during difficult times. As we reflect on the coming of Christ into the world, remember His birth happened on a dark night. His presence was revealed to simple men in the midst of their routine work. Although it is quite difficult to overlook the appearance of an angelic choir in the sky, (and how I would love to witness such a sight!) we can still behold His glory in the everyday miracles that reveal His fathomless love for us.

“Let’s go to Bethlehem...!” The shepherds’ response to the birth of the Christ Child was immediate and passionate. They found the precious family and humbly bowed before the tiny baby whose blood would reconcile them to the Father for eternity...and then, they shared the Good News.

Seek Him this Advent season! Look for Him in every circumstance!

“Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord;
That hath made Heaven and Earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought.”

Dr. Christi Emerson, Associate Professor, College of Nursing

Week 4

Peace



December 24
Silent Night
Oh, What A Night

No Christmas carol is more famous or recognized than “Silent Night.” Bing Crosby’s version is the third best-selling single record of all time. The simplicity of the words and the beauty of the melody makes this carol very recognizable around the world. “Silent Night” has been translated into one hundred and forty languages.

It was originally a poem composed by Joseph Mohr in 1816. In 1818 Joseph gave the words to his friend Franz Xavier Gruber and he wrote the melody. The carol was originally written to be accompanied by a guitar. On December 24, 1818, the two men introduced the Christmas carol during mass in a church located in Oberndorf, Austria. The rest is history. The carol was translated from German into English in 1859 by John Freeman Young. Next Year will be the 200th anniversary of the first time “Silent Night” was performed as a Christmas carol.

No song depicts the true meaning of Christmas better than “Silent Night.” The song tells us about the birth of the Christ child in verse one. In verse two the child is identified as “Christ the Savior.” In verse three the mission of Christ is identified as He is referred to as the “Son of God” who will bring “redeeming grace.” He has come to be “Lord.”

Is He Lord in your life? If He is Lord, then you can truly say “Oh What A Night.”

Dr. George Louthback, University Chaplain, Spiritual Life



December 25

Hark! The Herald-Angels Sing

*Hark! The herald-angels sing
"Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled"*

Today is the day! Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus, our savior, master, and king. Most of us are relieved from our regular work today. Christmas, well celebrated, usually involves pouring out our love on our family and friends. It is a day of good feelings and goodwill. It is a day of joy and a day of peace.

That was not the Christmas the newborn Jesus experienced. Christ was not born into a joyful, peaceful earth. His country of origin had been overrun by numerous foreign powers and was cruelly occupied on the day He arrived. But our Lord did not come to compete with any of those powers, foreign or domestic. He did not come to wage war; He has come to wage peace.

His weapons are not simple spears and chariots, or even the much deadlier modern equivalents. He is the God who breaks spears and burns chariots (Psalm 46:9). His weapons are holy, and much more powerful - sacrifice, humility, forgiveness, and mercy. Christ's weapons do not produce defeat; they produce reconciliation – man to God and man to man.

One of the things that makes Christmas so exciting is that this day is not just His day. It is our day. Jesus has called us to join Him in His ministry of reconciliation. He has called us to wage peace on the world. He has gifted us with those same weapons – sacrifice, humility, forgiveness, and mercy. We have only to ask for them and be prepared to employ them in our own hostile environment.

Today is the day! Take up your weapons, brothers and sisters. Storm the broken, violent world around you. Follow your savior, master and king, until that day when His peace covers the earth and all creation has been reconciled to Him.

Larry Locke, Associate Professor, McLane College of Business

Songs OF Hope

AN ADVENT READING GUIDE



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