

MOUNT OLIVET  
ADVENT & CHRISTMAS  
2020 DEVOTIONAL



*Emmanuel*  
*"God with Us"*

MATTHEW 1:23



# Emmanuel

*“God with Us”*

MATTHEW 1:23

Singing beloved Christmas carols is a cherished tradition. Something about hearing favorite melodies paired with familiar words transports us immediately into the Christmas season and spirit. But perhaps because these carols are both beloved and familiar, we sometimes miss their capacity not only to share the Christmas spirit but also to tell, even proclaim, the Christmas story in all its wonder.

Did you know, for instance, that “Joy to the World” is based on several Old Testament texts? Psalm 98’s command to “make a joyful noise to the Lord” is the major inspiration for this carol, with Psalm 96 expanding the “singers” to all elements of creation, including “fields, rocks, hills, and plains,” while the fall of humanity described in Genesis 3 is the backdrop to the promise that the blessings of the Christ child extend “as far as the curse is found.”

Recognizing just how much meaning is packed into our beloved carols, this season we’ve asked members of our Senior Choirs to reflect on the significance of various stanzas for their own faith journey, and the result of their labors is in your hands now. While we know that Christmas at Mount Olivet will necessarily be different this year, we also believe and trust that our celebrations will still be joyful, heartfelt, and meaningful. In fact, I dare you to read these devotions and not find your faith encouraged and commitment to share the love of God made so real in the Christ child increased. Let us, then, share in our thoughts, words, deeds – and songs! – the joy of Christmas and the “wonders of his love” with all the world!

*Pastor Lose*

**DAVID J. LOSE, SENIOR PASTOR**



DAY 1 | MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2020

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**O**ur family has a tradition of listening to the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College Chapel every Christmas Eve, tuning in together to hear the classic beauty of Anglican choral singing. It was during one of these services when I was young that I discovered what would become one of my favorite carols, *In the Bleak Midwinter*.

In reflecting on the challenges and uncertainty that 2020 has brought with it, the carol has new and even more profound meaning for me today. It begins with images of a desolate landscape where the cold has rendered even the elements frozen and immobile: "*In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.*" On top of this frigid tundra, snow continues to fall: "*Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow.*" For me, these lyrics bring to mind the weariness, and sometimes hopelessness, that many have been feeling as we continue to deal with the uncertainties of the world in which we currently find ourselves. Like snow piling on top of a frigid landscape, the challenges that many are facing continue to pile up. Many are stretched thin, feeling tired and disconnected.

Where is there light and warmth in what seems like an endless winter for some? As the carol tells us, it is in the love which cannot be contained: "*Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain; Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.*" At Christmas this love comes into the world in the form of Jesus and arrives in the most simple of places - a stable. So, too, do we experience this love together in the many acts of kindness and generosity, great and small, we show one another. "*What can I give Him, Poor as I am?*" As the carol beautifully answers, "*Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.*"

— GWEN COONEY, SOPRANO

*As we prepare for Jesus' coming this Advent season, may we open our hearts and remember that our love for one another is the greatest gift that we can give.*



DAY 2 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2020

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*“Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.”  
Oh Holy Night – Adolphe Adam 1847*

**I** love this carol. It always stills my heart and mind when I hear it (and sing it!). It reminds me of so many Christmases throughout my life and all those who sang it with me. It also reminds me of all that I am blessed with in this world, but perhaps most importantly, it reminds me of all that I should and can do in our world in His name for all of our sisters and brothers across humanity. This verse of *Oh Holy Night* always reminds me of one of my favorite bible verses: *“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”*  
– Matthew 25:40

– BONNIE COOL, ALTO

*Dear Lord, help me to live my life as you would have me live it, help me to bring compassion and support to others less fortunate than I, and thank you for the blessings I experience every day in this life. In Jesus name, Amen.*



DAY 3 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020

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*“Good Christian friends, rejoice,  
With heart and soul and voice;  
Give ye heed to what we say:  
Jesus Christ is born today!”*

**O**ne of my favorite Christmas moments is when my family sits around the glow of the lit up Christmas tree. The tree, which when you look at it and squint juuuuust right looks like it's covered in stars, and is hung with ornaments that showcase so many beautiful memories. This moment never fails to overwhelm me with a very special sense of comfort and hope.

This Christmas is bound to be different for many, if not all of us. So, in times steeped in change, doubt, and loss, where can we find an extra dose of Christmas hope?

I suggest we look to our Christmas trees. Trees are rooted on solid ground. Often, with roots so deep that even as the wind blows and the storms come, the trees bend, but they rarely break. The strongest of trees are rooted in nourished soil. What nourishes you to be your most full of life? What nourishes those who you care about most? How can you nourish your heart and the hearts of others a little bit extra this Christmas?

Evergreens remind us of the promise of everlasting life. The green branches point us to the ceaseless freshness of life – that even when we feel as though our world is growing cold, there is always an element of newness and rebirth, something to rejoice over. The evergreen, grounded and nourished, nicked and bruised, stands alive this Christmas. And not only that, it's cherished. And so are we. Through the hope found in Christ's birth each Christmas, the beauty of community and the gift of love, our forest of evergreens may look a bit different this year, but it's still calling us to bend and nourish. Calling us to rejoice.

– GENEVIEVE KALLAND, SOPRANO

*Lord, help us remember the beauty of the lit up evergreen, the sound of the choirs on Christmas Eve and the feeling of togetherness. Fill us with hope and joy in the immeasurable gift of Christ's birth. Amen.*



DAY 4 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2020

**S**tanding in the dark of our church along one of the aisles, I love to sing with the Senior Choir at the end of our annual Christmas concert this beloved song: *Peace, Peace, Peace on earth and goodwill to all*. One by one the candles are lit and the children's choirs join in with *Silent Night*. I have done this for many years now, including when my children were in the choirs. I always get goosebumps. I am filled with warmth and love as I sing. I observe the congregation react with many expressions: warm smiles, searching looks for their children in the choir, tears from memories past and present.

It is dark in the sanctuary, as it was the night of Jesus' birth. The candles are stars, the choirs are angel voices of music. Our Mount Olivet family is together with friends as we experience "love's pure light" that Jesus' birth brought to us that night and gives to us every day. I am energized by this holy celebration with the knowledge that there is love in our world, that we have been given redeeming grace, and that we have hope for tomorrow and life everlasting. And so we continue to sing:

*"Silent night, holy night,  
Son of God, love's pure light,  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus Lord at Thy birth,  
Jesus Lord at Thy birth."*

- JERRY JIRSA, TENOR



DAY 5 | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2020

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*“To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”*

Luke 2:11

I’ve always looked forward to Christmas. Like every young child, the weeks of waiting to open my presents seemed agonizingly slow.

But that long wait produced added bonuses. Once Thanksgiving turkey leftovers were in the fridge, my mother — who sang alto in the church choir and taught piano lessons — played Christmas albums almost continuously. She cranked up the volume on the stereo console in the living room so she could sing along in the kitchen. The sweet smell of Christmas cookies baking mingled with the sweet sound of the music playing and filled our house many December afternoons.

While growing up in St. Peter, MN, I found more ways to get ready for Christmas. There were my own choir rehearsals and Christmas programs. In fifth grade, I took up the trumpet, eventually playing alongside the organist on Christmas Eve. Practicing for the big day added to my anticipation.

Lutheran colleges have wonderful traditions of presenting Christmas music programs. At Gustavus in 1976, I had the honor of being in the original trio of herald trumpeters to lead off the closing hymn, *O Come All Ye Faithful*. The arrangement gradually builds to include the orchestra, all choirs, the Christ Chapel organ, and congregation. After an instrumental interlude, the final verse erupts to announce that our season of waiting and preparation has paid off:

*“Yea, Lord we greet Thee,  
Born this happy morning.  
Jesus, to Thee be glory giv’n!  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!  
O come, let us adore Him.  
O come, let us adore Him.  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!”*

Wow. Tears of joy remind me once again that Jesus’ birth is the greatest gift of all.

– STEVE KIND, BASS





DAY 6 | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2020

**W**hen was the last time you heard an Angel? Or experienced an Angel? If you listen closely to the melody of *Angels We Have Heard On High*, you can almost hear the angels “sweetly singing o’er the plains.” The cascading harmony, experienced when singing the long phrases of Gloria, makes me think of a peaceful, joy-filled moment, like if the world as we knew it stood still for a little sliver of Holiness to shine onto Earth.

So is an angel something you see? Or just know? Or is it like a warm rush of rich music that fills our choir loft and reaches everyone in the church pews? I don’t know. But I do know my faith because I have sung it. I experience that peaceful joy when my fellow altos and I harmonize with the bright and shiny sopranos. And when we are all in step with the long *Glo-ooooo-ooooo-ooooo-ria*, I feel something more than just singing the notes.

I had an unexpected angel moment this year when I was sure that the earth stood still for a little sliver of holiness to shine onto earth. This moment was when my dying mom, after a long battle with leukemia, was in her final moments of life. My dad, sister, and I were blessed to be at my mother’s side during her last hours. During a time of restlessness she asked, “Babs, can you see the angels?” I instinctively and without looking around for concrete evidence said, “I do Mom. I do see the angels.” And she said softly, “I knew you would.”

I hope others have experienced angels in their times of sadness, loss, or pain, too. We live in the promise that just as Jesus was born to this earth, we will someday be born to the next life. And in both of those instances, angels are present.

– BABS MARTIN, ALTO

*God, please be with those who have also been through a lot this year. Remind us all to come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing; come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn king. Gloria, in Excelsis Deo! Amen.*



DAY 7 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2020

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*“Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning:  
Jesus, to thee be all glory giv’n:  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:  
O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him;  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!”*

**O** *Come, All Ye Faithful* has long been my favorite Christmas carol. I remember very vividly a Christmas Eve service in my youth when I was standing next to my dad, singing this beloved hymn. He said, “Stop singing for a moment and just listen.” Hearing the congregation singing made me think of an angel choir and how it must have been on that day Christ was born.

It wasn’t until my later years that I sang the fourth and final verse of this carol. Now when we sing it on Christmas Eve, it strikes me as the most powerful verse of this song. It’s as if the entire message of Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection have been summed up in one powerful stanza!

I have often heard that “to sing is to pray twice.” And singing is how I witness my faith. I have sorely missed singing in choir throughout these past months and have been thinking about how to keep the spirit of Christmas in my heart despite missing the opportunity to sing with my Mount Olivet family on Christmas Eve. Writing this, I am reminded that Christmas is about keeping Christ within my heart – not just on December 24, but every day. And I do not need a choir to lift my voice in his praise.

And so I will sing *Oh Come, All Ye Faithful* on Christmas Eve - not alone, but in the company of saints and angels.

– MARTHA CARLSON, ALTO

*Dear Lord, help us to remember the precious gift you gave us on that happy morning and that Christmas is, more than anything else, your love made manifest. Remind us that our separateness from one another does not separate us from your love. O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord! Amen.*



DAY 8 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2020

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I'm writing this devotion on October 18. Each day is shorter than the last. I haven't been able to sing in the senior choir since March, and that won't change any time soon. Cases of COVID-19 are increasing in Minnesota, and it's likely that my wife and I will be largely confined to our house for the winter. I've written devotions before, but never in times like this.

It may therefore seem strange that for my Advent devotion, I chose the Norwegian carol *O Yule Full of Gladness* as an inspiration. We've sung it in Senior Choir over the years, and I appreciate it because of its cheerful, upbeat, and simple melody.

In this season that can seem darker than most, *O Yule Full of Gladness* provides a reminder of the importance of fellowship and unity. The third verse is my favorite; it goes like this: *"Now join hand in hand, and together we'll welcome the Yule, and pledge love and faith to each other. For we all are bound by the love that we share, Rejoice every sister and brother."*

These last few months have shown that, more than ever, we need to join hand in hand, to pledge love and faith to each other. Joining hand in hand, together, will help us overcome the problems that have long plagued our community, from systemic racism to the many inequalities made plain by the pandemic. If we pledge love and faith to each other, we can transform what Martin Luther King, Jr. once described as "jangling discords of our nation" into a "beautiful symphony of brotherhood." And if we share the love that this hymn evokes, then every sister and brother—in our congregation and elsewhere—can rejoice together as children of God.

That is my ardent hope: *God, let us join hand-in-hand together to welcome your birth, to pledge love and faith to each other, and to be bound together in addressing the world's neediest people so that we can all rejoice, every sister and brother.*

—JEFF JUSTMAN, TENOR



DAY 9 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020

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*“Joy of every longing heart.”*

**C**hristmas conjures up memories and feelings for me of joy, love, happiness, and just overall excitement. So when the Senior Choir began to practice Mark Sheppard’s arrangement of *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* for the 2013 Christmas concert, I was more than a bit confused. Not only was the song decidedly not cheery and upbeat (no bells even!) but it was deeply contemplative, slow, and chant-like. And then Dr. Claflin said there were going to be dancers... Again, I was deeply, deeply confused.

But the evening of the concert and singing that song was so moving that I will never forget it. The mood to me was shadowed, quiet, and reverent. It made me realize that I’ve lived my life in a world of “Christmastime” with brightness, love, joy, and forgiveness, but before Jesus was born, the world was dark. Singing this chant-like prayer of a song with my choir, while holding a single candle and watching the dancers move down the darkened sanctuary’s aisles, reminded me that God is with us all: those who dance, those who sing, and those that come to worship. He’s there during the times in my life that feel dark, when my heart is longing and heavy. I think of Joseph and Mary, how they must have felt during the time before Jesus was born, all that they went through. We all have had these darker times. But the joy of Jesus’ birth, and all that was to come is also something that we all share. He is the light in our darkness. God is with us ALL – ALL of the time.

– CHRISTY HANSON, ALTO

*Dear Lord, thank you for the shadows and for the light. For creating each of us uniquely with different gifts to share. And for the gift of music, and for the many sacred moments where my heart and my soul have been stirred and moved in our sanctuary.*



DAY 10 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2020

One of my most favorite Christmas carols is *Jul, Jul, Strålande Jul*. Its lyrics were written by Edvard Evers and the music was composed by Gustaf Nordqvist. It was first published in 1921. I learned the song when I was a student at Gustavus Adolphus College, in the early 1970's, as part of a Swedish hymn and folk song group that was organized and led by Linda Wallenberg. At that time, I could not read or speak Swedish. By learning the Swedish songs, I learned how to pronounce the Swedish lyrics.

Twenty years later I began to study Swedish, and then teach Swedish, as part of the 3M Language Society. When I retired from 3M, I decided to try teaching Swedish hymns and folk songs at Mount Olivet. There is no better way to learn than by teaching. I began to learn the individual nuances of individual songs. That is when *Jul, Jul, Strålande Jul* became one of my favorite Christmas carols. The melody has a waltz rhythm. When I discovered that waltz rhythm, I was drawn into the song even more.

Unfortunately, the lyrics to *Jul, Jul, Strålande Jul* do not translate into English as poetically as the original Swedish lyrics. The title of the song translates as Christmas, Christmas, Radiant Christmas and that is the theme of the lyrics for the first verse. There is not much daylight in Scandinavia at Christmas time. Christmas brings light, literally and figuratively! The lyrics that capture the light are “glistening white forests” and “heaven’s crown of lights” and “Northern lights.”

The second verse of *Jul, Jul, Strålande* segues to Jesus as the light of Christmas. The one who will bring peace and comfort for our troubles, for all generations.

I wish that I could share this experience with my mormor (mother’s mother), and also get some first-hand advice. She was a choir director for a small Swedish language church in southwest Minneapolis, from 1914 to 1930.

– PETER JOHNSON, BASS



DAY 11 | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2020

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*"I am so glad each Christmas Eve, the night of Jesus' birth!  
Then like the sun, the Star shone forth, and angels sang on earth."*

*JEG ER SA GLAD!*

**T**he song itself, music composed by Peder Knudsen with text by Inger M. Wexelsen in Norwegian and translated to English by Peter Sveeggen, is such a simple and memorable melody. Every time I hear the song it reminds me that I am surrounded by love from so many communities.

As a young girl I participated in Mount Olivet's Christmas Eve services by being part of Cherub, then the Girls' Choir back in the 1950's. Even after my family moved to Wisconsin in the early 1960's, we continued to drive all the way back to Minneapolis to attend the Mount Olivet Christmas Eve services.

I learned at an early age to love music. Music gives me an ear to hear how God loves me and a voice to share that love with the many people who hear our singing.

As a member of the Mount Olivet Senior Choir, I admit that I am a choir geek. I love participating in worship from the choir loft and singing with my friends. We have grown as a community who support one another and share in both the good and difficult times. The altos, including me, still keep in touch over Zoom!

Even though our world has changed so much this year I continue to be thankful for my church community which reaches out in unique ways and continues to show us that God is with us. So on Christmas Eve that is why I am so glad.

– CAROL LEMAY, ALTO



DAY 12 | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2020

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*“What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.”*

**M**y grandparents were fortunate to have emigrated from Denmark to Minnesota with the promise of a wonderful job as the foreman of a large farm complex. Each farm specialized in growing plants and livestock needed to supply the kitchens of hotels. Today, we would think of this agricultural model as the popular Farm-to-Table operation.

My grandfather oversaw the entire operation and my grandmother was responsible for preparing all meals for the many hard-working farm hands. Their family was blessed with three healthy children, and as they prepared for the birth of their fourth child, my grandmother accidentally stepped on a rusty nail. She believed that nail resulted in their fourth child being stillborn, and also that the nail was the catalyst for her developing a crippling case of rheumatoid arthritis which left her bedridden from age 27 until her death at age 77.

Sadly, my grandfather lost his job because of my grandmother's illness. Even so, my dad once told us that his very favorite Christmas was the year that their family had been plagued with loss, illness, death, and poverty. They moved from a beautiful home on a prosperous farm to what was known as the “pioneer farm” with no central heat, running water, and little to no food. Still, what my dad remembered most was the love their family shared that Christmas.

The first time I sang this song was as a member of the Senior Choir. I remember the beginning words, *“In the bleak midwinter; Frosty wind made moan; Water like a stone; Snow had fallen; Snow on snow...In the bleak midwinter; Long ago.”* I was transported to that most precious Christmas memory of my dad and his family.

– ROBERT HAVE, TENOR

*My prayer for this Advent: I pray during this time of pandemic, loss, and illness, that we may still be able to reach deep into our souls and give our hearts over to God and share the joy he brings to our lives.*



DAY 13 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2020

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*“O Come, Oh Bright and Morning Star  
And bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of night  
And turn our darkness into light.*

*Refrain: Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel, Shall come to you, O Israel.”*

**T**o quell the overload of anticipation, errands to run, rehearsals to attend, cards to write, gatherings to attend, and an overflowing calendar, the color-coded TO-DO list has become an essential part of maintaining a sense of organization and calm during the Advent season. Checking off each item brings a small sense of accomplishment, but the list does not fill my heart.

It is only as the choir lines up on Christmas Eve and a hush fills the air that I am filled with a sense of peace and calm to which no completed list compares. With a solemn prayer, *O, Come Emmanuel*, it is abundantly clear that gathering together and praising is where I experience true contentment and overflowing joy.

In the midst of the unknowns of Advent 2020, the desire to create a list and find a sense of order is very real. However, this year I have created a list with prayerful intent and a heart open to the comfort and light that is promised to each of us.

Memo: To Self

RE: JOY!

Date: Advent 2020

- Refresh a corner of my world to create a space for daily devotions and reflections.
- Reflect on special memories and take time to create a new one each day.
- Reimagine choir by playing Christmas carols each day and singing along.
- Reconnect with someone through a card, call or FaceTime and check in on them.
- Rejoice (Greatly!) in a new activity that allows you to add light to the world.

– NATALIE LARSON, SOPRANO

*O Come, Emmanuel. Guide us with your bright light and protect us from the shadows. Let us be renewed as we seek a relationship with you through prayer. Rejoice with us, as we continue to find joy in relationships, small moments and unexpected places. Amen.*





DAY 14 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2020

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*“Away in a manger no crib for His bed  
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.  
The stars in the sky look down where He lay  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.”*

**C**hristmas and music are inextricably linked for me. From John Denver and the Muppets: A Christmas Together to my collection of St. Olaf (my alma mater) Christmas Festival CDs (favorite: *I Saw Three Ships*), my car and home are filled with music beginning the day after Thanksgiving (okay, really early October, but some find that a bit excessive so I try to keep that a secret... shhh....).

And, of course, there is singing in the Senior Choir at Mount Olivet and singing around the piano with family and friends in Santa hats. These are my mainstays. My heart and soul--it's how I celebrate the greatest gift I've ever been given. My holiday wouldn't be complete without it. And yet, this year, it *has* to be complete without it. Long ago, I learned not to dwell on the negative because it gets me nowhere, but this is a tough one.

So as I contemplate what this Advent and Christmas season will be like during this unique and challenging year, I look to this quiet little hymn, *Away in a Manger*, and it gives me pause. There are no loud trumpets or majestic processions. No clanging bells or hats of any kind. There's a little babe. In a manger. Asleep in the hay. With stars looking down. Christmas will come. Christ will be born. All is well. Another awesome lesson in a long list of lessons I've learned during this, sigh, “unique and challenging” year.

And I still have the Muppets and St. Olaf CDs and memories and Zoom and my piano (with my husband only--who doesn't love a Christmas duet!). I'll enjoy music as best I can with an open and calm heart this year, and look with anticipation and joy to the musical reunions in the future. *I love Thee, Lord Jesus... please stay by my side 'til morning is nigh... Thanks be!*

– KATIE STEVENSON, ALTO



DAY 15 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2020

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*“O come, Thou Wisdom from on high  
And order all things, far and nigh  
To us the path of knowledge show  
And cause us in her ways to go.”*

**T**hrough the Advent season we sing songs of exaltation at the birth of the Christ child and of gentle awe at the humanity of a newborn. These verses and songs bring us into the now of Jesus’ birth and help us to feel what those in the manger came to feel that night. This sixth verse of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* is one we do not often see in the bulletins at Mount Olivet, but is awfully important today. It is not a burst of song and rejoicing like *Joy to the World* or a lullaby to the child, like *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*. The words of this verse of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* are a prayer being spoken by people that night, waiting for the birth of the Christ child. These words seek hope, guidance, reassurance, and promise from the child to be born. As we all struggle with the strife in our lives and seek to walk the footsteps of Christ, it is important for us not just to celebrate his birth, but embrace the wisdom that he brings and the paths that wisdom will open to us. When we listen and are ready to learn, we are able to be true followers of Christ.

As we look forward to Bethlehem this year, remember to listen and be open to the wisdom of God, and share the fruits of his wisdom with those around you that are in need of some comfort and support this year.

– PATRICK COOL, BASS

*Loving God, we pray that you continue to watch over all of your children on this earth as you have for so long. Guide those who are lost, and bring strength to those who feel they are at their most vulnerable. Your wisdom is the light we can follow through the darkest night. Continue to share it with us, that we may continue to live by your word. Amen.*



DAY 16 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020

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

**T**his verse, one we all know so well, begins the idyllic story of a wondrous night and the awe of a newborn child sent to save the world. It is the first of six original verses written in 1816 by a young Austrian priest, Joseph Mohr, not long after the Napoleonic wars had taken their toll.

It is a verse that has been sung in churches around the world, in town squares, in homes, at bedsides of children and even on the World War I battlefield during the temporary truce on Christmas Eve in 1914. Yet, unlike all the joyous hymns of this season calling on us to “hark the herald, the angels sing!” and to “go tell it on the mountain,” it is a verse of tender intimacy. It is assuring and incredibly personal. It implores us to see ourselves in this story.

It wasn’t that long ago that I became a mother of a child born just one week before Christmas on the very same day that my father came out of surgery at Mayo Clinic to learn his cancer was terminal. The celebration of a new life juxtaposed with the imminent death of another. All was certainly not calm, nor did it feel particularly bright.

We went along with our Christmas Eve celebrations that year all of us knowing that it was likely our last together. We sang beloved hymns, partook in our traditions, and tried mightily to make the most of time together. And, there in those moments, God was with us.

In the years since, I have wondered how auspicious it is that *Silent Night* was my father’s favorite Christmas hymn. A simple, solemn hymn telling not only the story of Christ’s birth but the promise of our rebirth. So that now when I hear the oh-so-familiar melody and sing the words “*all is calm, all is bright,*” I know he is there with me.

– JAYNE DOW LARKIN, ALTO

*Dear Lord, let us all find comfort and assurance in the promise of your birth.*



DAY 17 | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020

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*“Mild He lays His glory by...”*

**S**ome Christmas hymns simply retell the nativity story or express the wonder surrounding it. *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* does something different. It goes deep.

For a paper in a Pauline Epistles class at my Christian college, I chose to write an interpretation of Philippians 2:5-7:

*“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”*

When I got stuck on “he emptied himself,” I called my minister father to beg some emergency insight. Dad paused, then said something like, “How long is this paper supposed to be?”

I had stumbled on kenosis (Greek for the act of emptying), one of the most mysterious concepts in Christian theology. The mystery: How empty, exactly, did Christ become? How could he empty himself, come to earth as nothing, and still be God? I didn’t solve the mystery. But since then, every time I sing the third stanza of *Hark!*, kenosis lies in wait for me: *“Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die.”* The words remind me that God the Son pre-existed Bethlehem in glory. He created everything (John 1:3) and possessed every power—including the ability to lay aside his glory for a purpose he somehow thought was worth it.

We think of the cross as Christ’s most heroic and sacrificial act. But what about kenosis? Can we imagine what this glorious, radiant being gave up to be born poor, live in a human body, endure temptation, fatigue, hunger, thirst, sorrow, pain? But the lyrics of *Hark!* skillfully expound what he gained for us: peace, mercy, reconciliation with God, light, life, healing, new birth!

That’s how *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* became my favorite Christmas carol. I came for the festive Mendelssohn tune; I stayed for the theology.

– TOM JOHNSON, TENOR

*My Emmanuel, thank you for emptying yourself of your glory, so that I could be filled.*



DAY 18 | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020

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*“Truly He taught us to love one another.”*

**A**dvent would just not be the same without hearing the simple, yet magical melodies of *O Holy Night*. From the humble arpeggiated introduction, to the final glorious high note, I always get swept away hearing this entrancing song. However, as I humbly enjoy this song every year, I have begun to realize that the most moving aspects of this song lie in the messages of its text.

We are reminded of our salvation through Jesus’ birth: *“The weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.”* We are also reminded that Jesus knows our pain and suffering himself: *“He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger.”*

However, it is in the final verse that we are reminded of this song’s greatest teaching: love. *“Truly He taught us to love one another,”* it exclaims. Love is our Lord’s greatest teaching, and it seems evermore pertinent this Advent season with our increased distance, divisions, and differences. This year will be unlike any other we have experienced, but if we are able to love despite today’s challenges, perhaps we will be able to make this an Advent greater than any before. We all need more love during these times, so let us hear *O Holy Night* as a reminder to raise our sweet hymns of joy and love in grateful chorus this Advent season.

– DR. LUKE RANDALL, BARITONE & COORDINATOR  
OF THE MOUNT OLIVET SCHOOL OF MUSIC

*Dear Lord, in these unprecedented and trying times, give us all the humility to know that despite these incredibly difficult times of distance, divisions, and differences, you have not called us to judge, but to love.*



DAY 19 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020

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

**S***ilent Night* has always been a favorite of mine. I remember loving it as a little girl. As I got older and got to pair it with *Peace, Peace* at the annual Christmas concert, it began moving me to tears. Standing in the sanctuary, holding a candle, I look out at all the faces, all so different yet so much the same, and feel that sense of a silent night and peace on earth that we all crave.

Last year, though, it meant even more. It was the first time that my own child, my then two-and-a-half-year-old son, attended the concert. I knew where I'd be standing in the aisle so my husband, our son, and my parents were able to sit right where I was to stand. Looking down at my sweet boy, the love and peace on his face, in the midst of this beautiful song, brought me to a place where I could no longer sing. Despite all that is happening in the world, I know that there is hope. I can see it in this little boy. I believe that Mary saw it in her baby, Jesus. We are so blessed to see it every year in the spirit of Christmas.

– KELSEY STOMMEL, ALTO

*Dear God, thank you for sharing your Son with us. We are so blessed to know Him and feel your love. Thank you for reminding us that there is always hope. Please continue to send us reminders like the song “Silent Night.”*  
*In your Son's name we pray, Amen.*



DAY 20 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2020

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*“Peace on the earth, good will to all,  
from heaven’s all-gracious King.  
The world in solemn stillness lay,  
to hear the angels sing.”*

**T**his verse of *“It Came upon a Midnight Clear”* always reminds me of the Christmas Eve services of my youth. It embodies the anticipation of riding home from church to our family celebration. We usually attended the later service, so it was always dark when the service finished. After the pastor gave his sermon, we ended with *Silent Night*, and the lights were lowered at the end of the hymn. The congregation filed out of the sanctuary in near silence. It was this calm and peaceful feeling that continued out of church, and into the parking lot. It stayed with me during our drive home. The dark night and quiet drive home gave me time to reflect on and anticipate the celebration dinner with gifts and reciting the comforting reminder of the Christ Child’s birth.

There is a special peace and quiet of a winter night that is unique to any other time of the year. The snow muffles all sound, and the dark stills all movement. These serene, cold, dark drives home were usually not interrupted by other cars, because most people in town were already at home or in church celebrating the holiday. I often thought of the refrain *“the world in solemn stillness lay”* during these drives; much more so after our Christmas service hearing the angels sing about the manger and the baby Jesus.

Once home, we celebrated with dinner, presents, and a reading of Luke 2, chapters 1 - 20. Whenever I sing *“the world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing,”* I am reminded of this precious time during my youth. God loves us, and he is with us in Jesus.

– MARK STEVENSON, TENOR

*Lord, help us remember the solemn stillness of Christmas Eve. While we are still,  
and hearing the angels sing, guide our actions so we continue to  
strive for peace and goodwill to all.*



**A**s my family, choir director Dr. Beverly Claffin, and the second altos who sit next to me can attest to; most music involving Scripture or God's love and grace will undoubtedly move me to tears.

A particularly powerful Christmas piece for me is "O, Holy Night." Written by a secular French poet in 1847, at the request of a priest for a Christmas service, he utilized Luke's Gospel account to pen the lyrics. He then commissioned a composer, who happened to be of Jewish decent, to write the music. Neither poet nor musician were of the Christian faith and once that was determined by the church, the song was forbidden for use in worship.

Almost 10 years later the song was brought to America by John Sullivan Dwight, an abolitionist adamantly against slavery. He added the verse:

*Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace;  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,  
and in His Name all oppression shall cease.*

Of the other words and verses, these action-filled lyrical phrases capture my mind and also cause my tears to flow:

*Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices,  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!  
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger.  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend.*

As I learned from this story, God uses many people to accomplish His purposes and to that end, it is my prayer, *that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* (Philippians 2:10-11)

— MARYELLEN BROGE, ALTO

*Father, thank you for knowing my every need, and experiencing my every weakness.  
Teach me daily how to love others and spread your peace. May the words of my  
mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight O Lord, my  
strength and my redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)





DAY 22 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2020

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*“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.”*

**T**he first time I heard this Norwegian hymn, *I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve* (*Jeg er så glad*), was actually at my first Mount Olivet Christmas Eve service. At the time I was a new resident of Minnesota, and my exposure to Scandinavian traditions and music was very limited. But one can't be around Mount Olivet for very long before you become aware of all the delightful Scandinavian customs that are a part of the history and culture of this congregation. From lefse to Dala horses, to lingonberries, rice pudding, and Norwegian sweaters, the Scandinavian influence is especially abundant during the Christmas season! And because of the desire to honor these cultural traditions, the simple yet charming Norwegian carol is sung each year at each worship service on Christmas Eve.

The beautiful candlelit worship services provide the backdrop for the hymn which consists of a folk melody with a gentle lilt and the direct yet almost childlike lyrics. This year in particular when much of what we know as the Christmas season has changed, when perhaps we are feeling the weight of the pandemic or the loss that it has brought, it is then when we hold on to the simplicity and truth of this text. For regardless of all that is happening in our world, Christmas still comes. Christ is born bringing to us the message of God's constant presence, love, and faithfulness.

*“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.”*

– DR. BEVERLY CLAFLIN, DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP &  
MUSIC

*Dear God, thank you for the gift of Christmas, the promise of hope,  
and the joy of your love. Amen.*



# ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

## SUNDAYS - *Emmanuel "God with Us"*

Watch the worship services at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org). Radio Broadcast on WDGY 740AM at 11am.

### FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT 11/29

*Gabriel visits Mary* – Luke 1:26-38, Sermon: **PASTOR KALLAND**

### SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT 12/6

*Mary visits Elizabeth* – Luke 1:39-56, Sermon: **PASTOR HAMMERSTEN**

### THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT 12/13

*Gabriel visits Joseph* – Matthew 1:18-25, Sermon: **PASTOR LOSE**

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT & COMMUNION SUNDAY 12/20

*Emmanuel, Wonderful Counselor* – Isaiah 7:10-14, 9:6-7.

Sermon: **PASTOR RUUD**

### FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS 12/27 Sermon: **PASTOR DIXON**

## WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

### IN-PERSON OPEN PRAYER

12/2, 12/9, 12/16, 12/23, 10am-12noon & 6-7pm, Mpls & West Campus.

12/30, 10am-12noon *only*, Mpls & West Campus.

### IN-PERSON HOLY COMMUNION

12/2, 12noon & 7pm, register at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org).

### IN-PERSON SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE

Mpls Campus: 12/8 at 7pm & 12/9 at 1pm, West Campus: 12/15 at 7pm & 12/16 at 1pm, register at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org) **OR** watch online at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org) starting on 12/8.

### CHRISTMAS CONCERT 12/13, available at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org).

### CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE 12/24, available at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org), and

2pm Radio Broadcast on WDGY 740AM. Sermon: **PASTOR LOSE**

### CHRISTMAS EVE 11PM CANDLELIGHTING

12/24, 11pm, available at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org).

### CHRISTMAS DAY COMMUNION SERVICE

12/25, available at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org). Sermon: **PASTOR MACLEAN**

### NEW YEAR'S EVE SERVICE 12/31, 7pm, via Zoom, register at [mtolivet.org](http://mtolivet.org).

Sermon: **PASTOR KALLAND**



*Merry Christmas!*



## MOUNT OLIVET LUTHERAN CHURCH

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