Fresh Christmas Carols and Readings

Meditations, prayers, scripture, and recorded new carols for public worship and personal devotions

from the series: Fresh Views of Timeless Truths

Ken Bible



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Christmas Is a Story of Love

Love is from God... God is love... God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. (1 John 4:7, 8; John 3:16, NASB)

Christmas is a story of Love. For hundreds of years, Love had whispered, "I am coming! I am coming to be with you, to stay with you forever!"

It was Love that celebrated that night in the skies over Bethlehem with angels, music, and shouts of praise.

Love was the shining star high in the sky, sent to draw people from far away to come and worship the Baby.

And Love has entered our hearts.
We can feel it drawing us to love and worship God.
We can see it gathering us together to celebrate His coming.
And we can sense it reaching out this Christmas to share with the needy all around us.

Christmas is a story of Love, Love that has come to us, Love that has brightened our lives; and Love is Jesus.

Hymn Recording: Love Has Come!



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Share in Christ

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all the people were on their way to register for the census, each to his own city.

Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was pregnant. (Luke 2:1-5, NASB)

Consider the people nearest to Jesus during His life on earth:

His mother, His father, His disciples.

Those closest to Him shared His sufferings.

In their own degree, they bore what Jesus bore.

Their relationship with that one man cost them everything.

For them, the mysteries of the transcendent God weren't abstract and far away.

They witnessed those mysteries close up.

They tasted them.

They journeyed through them.

They wrestled with them daily -

the light, the darkness,

the privilege, the pain,

the waiting, the questions, the wrenching self-sacrifice.

For each, it started with a personal call.

They sensed it was the call of the Living God,

and that decided their response,

though they couldn't see the end from the beginning.

Mary answered the angel,

"I am the Lord's servant...May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38, NIV). Joseph obeyed a dream and took a pregnant woman as his fiancé.

The disciples, average working men with deep local connections,

dropped everything familiar and

followed a homeless, itinerant teacher.

The price was real,

but the result was life rich beyond imagination, permeated with truth and peace,

love and fruitfulness, eternal meaning and undying glory. That is still the price and the reward for all who share in Christ.

> An unwanted decree from an unfriendly government, a long, difficult journey with a shameful pregnancy, lousy accommodations, a painful labor in tough circumstances, and only a feeding trough for a cradle – yet through all these God was blessing the entire world. What unpleasant circumstances is He using in your life?

Hymn Recording: Partners in the Mystery



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Christmas Is the Story of a Baby

While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:6-7, NIV)

Christmas is the story of a Baby a tiny, crying, cute little Baby. Instead of diapers, He was wrapped tightly in "swaddling clothes", strips of cloth to keep his limbs warm and straight. Instead of a cradle, He was laid in a manger a feeding trough for animals. He had no other place to sleep.

Why would God leave the beauty, the peace, and the happiness of heaven to become a poor, weak, helpless Infant? Why would He lay aside the glory of all He was and take upon Himself the simplicity of a child?

He came to be close to us, to touch us, to become like us so that we could become like Him. He came because He loved us.

Christmas is the story of a Baby, a beautiful, heavenly, human little Baby; and the Baby was Jesus.

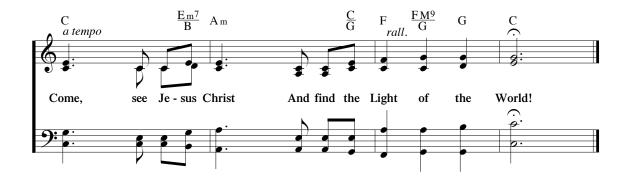
Hymn Recording: The Light Is Born

The Light Is Born

Luke 2:1-20



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Incarnation Wonder

No one has seen God at any time; God the only Son, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18, NASB)

As you kneel on the dirt floor of the stable and look down at the helpless infant, know that Jesus is already doing what He came to do: He is letting us see and feel what God is like.

There in the darkness, pain, desperation, and fear, God's presence is already light, joy, peace, and the warm assurance of hope.

When God "invaded" earth,

He didn't come as

a military conqueror or a judge, though He can be both. He came as the lowest of the low, a helpless infant born of a disgraced peasant girl.

Look down at Him. The incarnate Word is humbly, beautifully, wordlessly proclaiming that God is love!



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What a Beginning!

"Behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a Son, and they shall name Him Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23, NASB)

Almighty,

Holv. Transcendent God entered His created world in total helplessness and deep shame. He came as the apparently-illegitimate child of an unmarried peasant girl, born as the lowest of the low in a filthy stable, with only a borrowed feeding trough for a cradle. Poor shepherds and pagan foreigners were the only invited guests. Surely the whole idea seemed ridiculous to those who for centuries had been anticipating the arrival of their Glorious King and Mighty Deliverer. But those who know and love this surprising, even shocking, God find it entirely in character. The Omnipotent Source of All is endlessly creative and stunningly, endearingly humble. Such an entrance is exactly His style! From the very beginning of His incarnation, He was telling us about Himself in delightfully vivid, even charming ways that all could understand. He wanted everyone to know Him and trust Him naturally, warmly, wholeheartedly. This was only the beginning of His

This was only the beginning of His astonishing self-revelation. And O what a beginning it was!

Hymn Recording: The Birthday Party

The Birthday Party



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You Come

I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10b, NASB)

God, so eager to give, You came to us. You gave Yourself completely, birth to death. You became like us, weak. humble, suffering, dying, so that we might become like You. Holy God, breath of love, unbounded Spirit, You come to us. As we trust You, though imperfectly, You give Yourself to us. You live and breathe as Christ in us, eagerly sharing Yourself with us. God of unfailing promises, You will come to us again. At the perfect moment You will come as a bridegroom comes, eager to sweep away His bride on their long-awaited day. All the universe will celebrate with us.

You came once, in love. Come again, Lord Jesus. We are waiting.

Hymn Recording: Our God Came to Visit

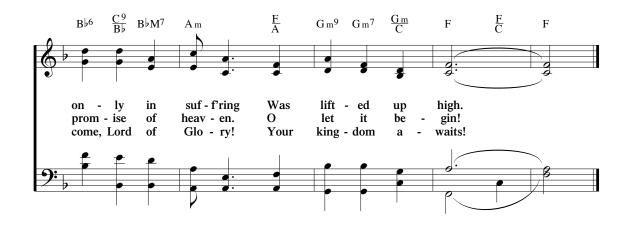


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MANTLE SO GREEN 6.5.6.5.D.

Alt. Tunes: ST. DENIO; CRADLE SONG

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Christmas Is a Story of Light

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock at night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

And so the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12, NASB)

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." (Isaiah 60:1,NASB)

Christmas is a story of Light. In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light.

When His Son was born into the world, God said,

"Let there be light!" And the glory of heaven flooded the night sky.

When God enters our hearts, He says, "Let there be light!" And He fills us with the warmth and glow of His presence.

That's why we celebrate Christmas by hanging beautiful lights all around us: Because the Light has come into our world and into our hearts.

Christmas is a story of Light, and the Light of the World is Jesus.

Hymn Recording: Light Is Shining All Around



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Mysterious Wonders

And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army of angels praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased."

When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen Him, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it were amazed about the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them. (Luke 2:13-20, NASB)

Imagine the mysterious wonders of that first Christmas night.

A world-changing event, foretold for centuries, was actually happening, and only a handful of the commonest people knew it.

God Himself was becoming flesh and blood, arriving as the most helpless of creatures: a human infant.

This child had been conceived by an infinite spirit being and a young virgin, probably a teenage girl.

Imagine what the shepherds saw and heard and felt. In the blackness of a silent night in the open fields, suddenly a blazing light, a stunning message, and a sky full of angels.

But how would the shepherds recognize this "Savior...Christ the Lord"? What would make Him unique? It would be His shocking lowliness and poverty. They would find an infant, wrapped up like a newborn, lying in a feeding trough.

Imagine yourself a shepherd, on the ground, gazing out into the blackness, hearing only the night sounds.

Hymn Recording: The Shepherd's Carol

The Shepherd's Carol

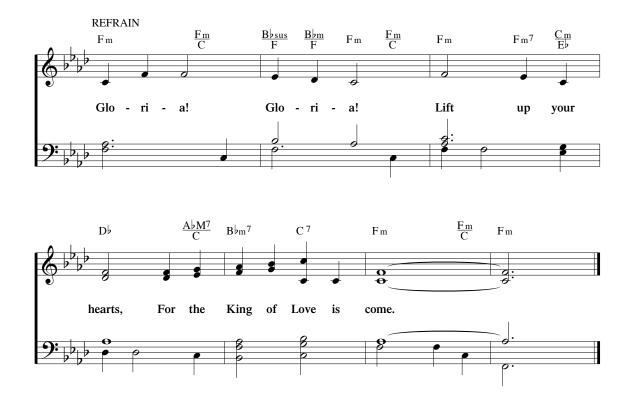


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Christmas Is the Story of a King

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For from you will come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.''' (Matthew 2:1-6, NASB)

Christmas is the story of a King.

When the King was born,

Caesar Augustus was Emperor of Rome.

He ruled the world

with great power and

vast military might.

But he died in 14 A.D.,

and his kingdom passed to another.

Herod the Great was King of Judea. He ruled with violence and cruel jealousy. He tried to kill the Child King. The Child lived, but Herod died, and his power died with him.

The Child King was Lord of the Universe, Almighty God. He ruled with humility and self-sacrifice, with love and forgiveness. He faced death and destroyed it. His Kingdom will never end.

Christmas is the story of a King, and our King forever is *Jesus.*

Hymn Recording: Infinite Lord



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Christmas Is the Story of a Gift

After they came into the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary; and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11, NASB)

Christmas is the story of a Gift.

Love enjoys giving gifts! Love doesn't give out of obligation or selfish motives. Love gives out of joy. Love gives because it is kind and longs to bless everyone within its reach.

God is love. He is the giver of every good gift. He doesn't give out of need— He has no need. God gives because He is full and overflows. He gives because He longs to bless each and every one of us.

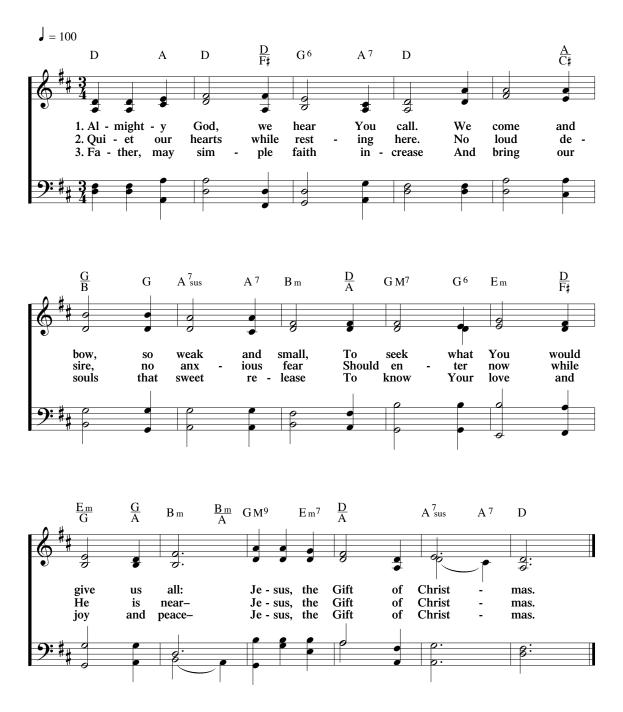
At Christmas God gives the greatest gift that can be given. He gives us *Himself.* To we who are so selfish He is love pure, boundless, unconditional love. To all who are fearful and despairing He is hope. In our worries and anxieties He is joy and peace. He is deep, unshakable well-being. And to all of us who are slaves to death He is life rich, full, ever-growing life.

Thanks be to God for Jesus. Almighty Holy Father, You do not abandon us to our puny self-improvement schemes and our stumbling efforts. Your gift to each of us and all of us is the mighty life of Jesus Christ, ours by simple faith.

Hymn Recording: Jesus, the Gift of Christmas

Jesus, the Gift of Christmas

TUNE: The Friendly Beasts (ORIENTIS PARTIBUS)



WORDS: Ken Bible MUSIC: French Melody, 13th c.; arr. by Ken Bible ORIENTIS PARTIBUS 8.8.8.7.

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The Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it. (John 1:1-5, NASB)

Matthew's gospel focuses on showing the Jews that Jesus is their promised Messiah. Thus he begins with Jesus' human genealogy, proving that Jesus descended from King David.

John's gospel focuses on

Jesus' relationship with God, His Father. Therefore he begins with Jesus' divine genealogy.

He says:

In the beginning, the very beginning, before anything else was, Jesus was already there with God the Father. They were two persons but one life, one Being, one God. Jesus is the Word, the full and perfect Word, spoken from the Father's great heart to us. All that the Father wills, the Son makes reality. All that the Father's love imagines,

all the life, all the light, all the riches of His own being, are born in our world and

in us

through Jesus Christ.

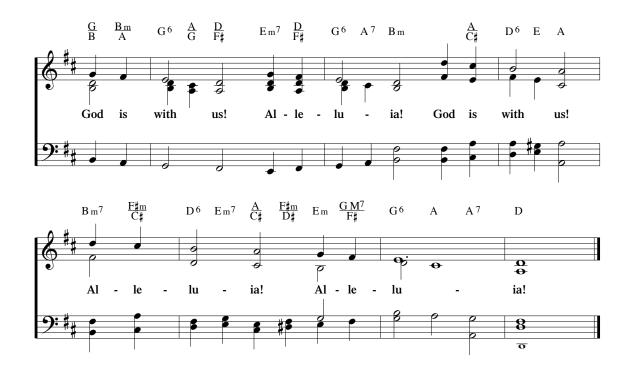
Father, may Jesus Christ be all that You want Him to be

in my thinking, my speaking, and my doing. I want to be one with You in Him.

Hymn Recording: God Is with Us! Alleluia!



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Jesus' Family

Notice the women mentioned in these excerpts from Matthew 1:1-16: A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was <u>Tamar</u>...

...Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was <u>Rahab</u>, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was <u>Ruth</u>, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been <u>Uriah's wife</u>...

...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of <u>Mary</u>, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (NIV)

For a Jew in biblical times, his genealogy was the leading item on his resume. It was his pedigree, and often it included only men. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 bends tradition by including five women. And what a colorful lot they were!

Tamar entered Jesus' family tree by seducing her father-in-law.

Rahab was a prostitute. Both she and Ruth were foreigners...outsiders... unclean Gentiles.

The woman called "Uriah's wife" was Bathsheba. She won her place by committing adultery with King David, who then murdered her husband.

And finally, Mary was a teenager who became pregnant before she was married.

Even in his genealogy, Jesus broke down all barriers between us, and between us and God. He embraces us all as His own family if we simply trust Him. *In Him there is no Jew nor Gentile, male nor female. We are all one in Jesus Christ* (Galatians 3:26, 28, para.). Our holy God is proud to call Himself our Brother (Hebrews 2:11, para.).

Father, our treasure is not our passing possessions or the money that flows through our fingers, but You and Your eternal love for us.

Hymn Recording: Family Tree



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Simeon

And when eight days were completed so that it was time for His circumcision, He was also named Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

And when the days for their purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord: "Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what has been stated in the Law of the Lord: "A pair of turtledoves or two young doves."

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

"Now, Lord, You are letting Your bond-servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all the peoples: A light for revelation for the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel."

And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to His mother Mary, "Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and as a sign to be opposed— and a sword will pierce your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:21-35, NASB)

As far as the world around could see, it was

an ordinary scene on

an ordinary day.

Peasant parents had brought their newborn to the temple

to do what the law of God required.

Jesus had been named on the eighth day,

and His circumcision had marked His belonging to God's covenant people.

Now, after forty days, they had come

to offer a sacrifice for Mary's cleansing (Leviticus 12:6-8) and to present Jesus to God.

From the time of the Exodus,

when God saved Israel's firstborn sons from the destroying angel,

God had claimed every firstborn son as His own

(Exodus 13:2, 12; Numbers 3:13; 8:17).

Each could be redeemed for five shekels.

But since Luke mentions no redemption,

it's possible that Jesus was not redeemed.

He was likely given back to the Lord for His service,

as Samuel had been.

Unlike the birth, there was

no angel choir,

no spectacular vision.

But the Holy Spirit faithfully witnessed to the infant Messiah,

as He always does:

"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." (John 15:26; 16:14, NIV)

Already the Spirit had witnessed to Jesus

through Elizabeth and the unborn John the Baptist (Luke 1:41-42) and through John's father, Zechariah (Luke 1:67).

Now the Spirit spoke through the righteous Simeon.

Waiting, longing, and expecting, Simeon needed only

the quiet, inner prompting of the Holy Spirit.

God allowed him to

hold the infant Messiah and

participate in a once-in-history move of God.

Through Simeon and

through the ceremonies of God's law,

Jesus was received into God's faithful people.

Those near Him,

those who recognized Him as Messiah,

like Simeon, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph,

would be God's servants to

welcome Him, nurture Him, train Him, support Him, and spread the word about Him. They would share His suffering and be honored with a place in His timeless story.

Be like Simeon. Keep your eyes, your heart, your hope fixed on God. See Him move... and be ready to participate!

Hymn Recording: Simeon





WORDS: Ken Bible MUSIC: Michael Praetorius (1571-1621) and Ken Bible

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Christmas Is Past, Present, and Future

Christmas is more than just a celebration of a past event, however wonderful or important. The God who came to us as an infant still comes to us personally. gently, quietly, now as then. He still comes to us as marvelous, mysterious Life, drawing us toward Himself. He is still the Light in every dark place, the Star shining from the bottomless blackness, the fresh glow in every dingy stable. He still invites the magi and the shepherds, the highest and lowest of people. He still comes in stunning humility, yet in unearthly glory. He is still awe-inspiring in His transcendence and His simplicity. The God who came is still coming. And He is coming again. As before, He will come unexpectedly. after a seemingly endless wait, and at just the right time. But this time, He will come, not quietly, but with sound of a trumpet; not simply, but with all of heaven's angels; not in a dark corner, but where every eye will see Him. He will come. not as a helpless infant, but as sovereign Lord and Judge of all.

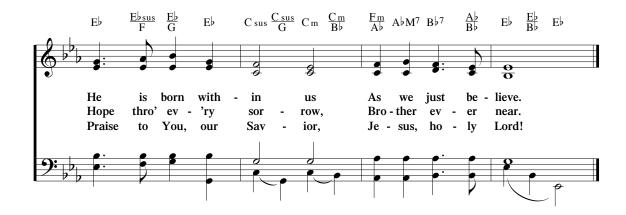
The God who came is coming and will come again in love, to save completely all who will receive Him.

Hymn Recording: God Is Here Among Us



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Christmas Is for Everyone!

Christmas is for everyone! God's great Gift is given to each of us and to all of us.

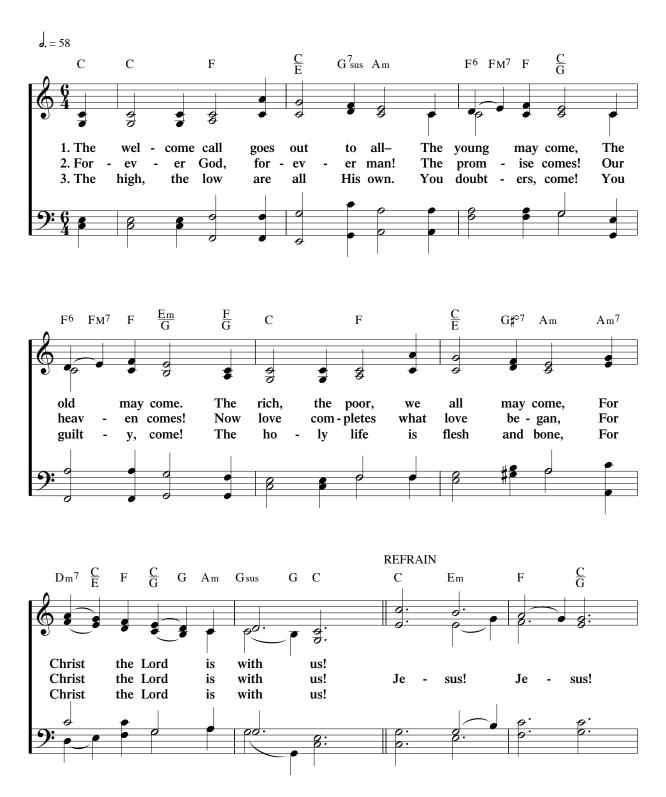
Jesus Christ is the Savior of the entire human racenot just *our* nation or *our* religion. Culture doesn't matter. Education doesn't matter. Age doesn't matter. Money doesn't matter. Every human being can have a rich, full, satisfying life, now and forever, by simply trusting Jesus Christ.

God wants everyone to know!

Hymn Recording: Christ the Lord Is with Us!

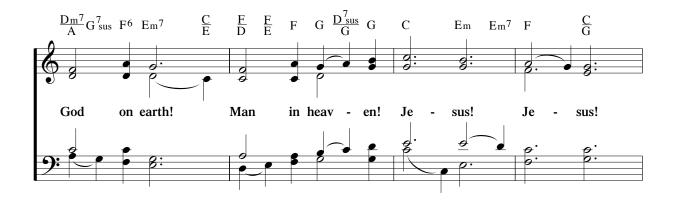
Christ the Lord Is with Us!

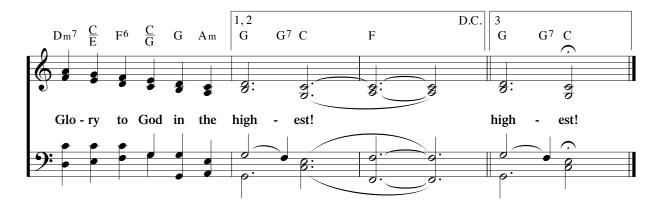
Isaiah 40:9-11; 55:1-7; Matthew 22:2-14; Luke 14:15-24; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Revelation 22:16b-17



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He Came

The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14, NASB)

When I read the story of creation in Genesis chapter 1, what I find most moving is the way God poured himself into the creation process. With the earth still a "formless void," He fashioned it step-by-step into a home for us.

He bathed it in light.

He brought order to the waters and the dry land.

Then He filled the skies, the seas, and the land with life--abundant life, life of every description, both plant and animal, life that even now is beyond our imagination. And at each stage He examined His work and saw that it was good. Reading this passage, you can sense the joy that He took in all He made. Here is a Mighty Being, infinite in power, infinite in wisdom, lovingly investing himself in the creation of a home for His children. He lavishly provides for their every need: warmth, water, food, friendship. Then He decorates this home with beauty, wonder, discovery, and surprise. He stocks this marvelous place with all the riches of life.

He is a Father. He wants the best for His children.

But ask yourself this: What if they go wrong? What if He sees them, not happy and at peace, but in desperate need, confused, self-centered, ignoring Him and using His precious gifts to destroy themselves? What if He has to watch as they needlessly suffer and die?

What would such a Father do, consumed by love for His lost children?

He would come to them. He would come himself. He would live among them and be like them so that He could understand and know them. He would talk to them, face-to-face. He would touch them and let them touch Him. He would heal them, feed them, comfort them, and teach them. And if necessary, like any Father, He would gladly die for them.

And that's what He did. He came to us.

He was born the poorest of children. He taught, fed, healed, and comforted His people. He walked, talked, and suffered with them. And after only 33 years, He died the most hated and most loved of all our race.

Discover Him. Discover this person, this God. Discover your your Creator, your divine Brother, the One who came to make life all it can be and all His love had conceived it to be. Discover Him for yourself. Discover Jesus.

Hymn Recording: Discover Jesus Christ

