

A Deeper Christmas

**Thought-provoking
reflections and prayers
for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany**

**with links to printed and recorded
new hymns.**

Ken Bible

LNW*books*.com

A DEEPER CHRISTMAS, p.2

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Introducing Jesus Christ

Introduction

Jesus said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.
(Luke 24:25, 27, NASB)

Imagine that you'd like to get to know a certain city. Maybe you're visiting on vacation, or perhaps you're considering moving there. There are several ways you can approach the task.

You can explore the city up close. Spend some time. Visit its sites. Drive its streets. Eat in its restaurants. Walk its neighborhoods. Observe the people and interact with them.

Or, you can observe the city as a whole, from a distance. Go up in an airplane and get a perspective that you can't get up close. See its overall character and layout. Learn how it fits into the geography of the region. Drink in the panorama.

The Bible gives us both perspectives on Jesus Christ. In the Gospels we see Him up close. We walk with Him, eat with Him, watch Him in various settings, and hear from the people who knew Him.

In the Old Testament prophets we see Him from a distance. These prophets wrote many centuries before He was born. Though their prophecies are amazingly detailed, they are most moving in their overall view of Him. We see Him in context. We get a broad perspective on His character. We see how He fits into the Father's plan and purpose for all of history.

It's said that up close, sometimes we can't see the forest for the trees. Applying that to Jesus Christ, the prophets give us a great view of the forest in all its richness and beauty.

As they view Jesus towering over all history, the prophets struggle to describe Him in terms that are understandable to us yet still do justice to His greatness, the depth of His character, and His impact on our lives. He is:

- a great Light in our darkness (Isaiah 9:2; 60:1-6).
- a mighty King who will rule everywhere and forever (Isaiah 9:6-7; 16:5; Zechariah 9:9-10; 2 Samuel 7:16; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalms 2; 72).
- a Deliverer and Provider (Isaiah 61:1-3).

- a Redeemer and Savior (Isaiah 63:7-9).
- a Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).
- a Priest (Psalm 110:4).
- a Servant who gives Himself for His people (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).
- a Shepherd (Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:22-24; Micah 5:2-5a).
- God with Us (Isaiah 7:14; 40:9-10).

Much more is said of Him. But in the pieces that follow, we will focus on just a few of the Bible's images of Jesus Christ. In addition to the Old Testament pictures, we've included some from the New Testament. All give us the broad picture of Him, the panorama, and all are focused on the significance of His coming. Images related specifically to His ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection will be left for another day.

The individual pictures will be tapestries woven from scripture, reflections, and prayers. Also, click the links to printed and recorded new hymns, found on LNWhymns.com. These hymns are rich, fresh, and thought-provoking. You'll find that they are a meaningful and integral part of the book.

We pray that all these tapestries stimulate your mind, heart and imagination. May they show you Jesus Christ in all His divine and human beauty. May you be drawn deeper and deeper into the magnificent person that He is.

Ken Bible

What Does Christ Think of Christmas?

Each year as I approach Christmas, I brace myself for the rigorous schedule. I think of the huge investments of time and energy. I quietly wonder if, spiritually speaking, we're really getting our money's worth out of all this. What does Christ think of our Christmas celebrations anyway? How much of it is even pleasing to Him?

Remember that He is the One who saw straight through empty words and ceremony. He was absolutely ruthless toward such "praise." His quotation of Isaiah 29:13 still rings in my ears:

*These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain. (Matthew 15:8-9, NIV)*

When the disciples were impressed by the beauty of the Temple, Jesus spoke God's displeasure and foretold its complete destruction. He was vehement as He condemned

the Pharisees for their pomp and pride. They made a show of their religion while ignoring what matters most to God.

Instead, Jesus was impressed by the selfless, tenacious faith of the Syro-phoenician woman, by the quiet dedication of the widow giving her mite, and by the desperately honest prayer, "*God, have mercy on me, a sinner*" (Luke 18:13).

He gently rebuked His good friend Martha for her well-intentioned busy-ness. Her sister, Mary, had chosen the only thing that was needed: to sit and quietly listen at the Lord's feet (Luke 10:38-42).

What would this Jesus think of our Christmas celebrations?

Or more properly, what would He think of *my* Christmas celebrations? All true worship takes place in the heart, so if true worship is lacking, the problem is in me.

In spite of all the "religious activity" that goes on, I've found that Christmas can be a barren time spiritually. Often little happens between God and me – little real celebration of what He has done, little true worship, little heart-to-heart with my Father. If nothing is happening in my heart, what good is any of the celebrating?

Our Lord, our Savior, we want to spend this Christmas with You, looking to You, worshiping You, and hearing Your voice.

What's in a Name? Jesus Christ

"Jesus" is His first name, like "Justin" or "Emily" (they didn't use last names). "Jesus" was a common name at the time. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, "Joshua," which means, "The Lord saves." Before He was born, the angel commanded His parents to name Him "*Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

"Christ" is His title. It's the Greek word for "Messiah," which means "The Anointed One."

Thus "Jesus Christ" is His name and His title. It means "Jesus Messiah."

Christ Our Pattern

*Read Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20;
2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:9-12; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9-10*

Jesus Christ is not simply the corrective
for humanity gone wrong.
He is humanity's original blueprint,
our model,
our pattern,
the original purpose and prototype that drove our creation.

We were designed and created to be like Him:
holy – completely separated to God the Father;
a ruler – overseeing God's wondrous creation;
a servant – humbly, eagerly doing the Father's will;
God's child – gloriously, lovingly like Him.

We were fashioned to focus on Him.
We were given
a mind, that we might know Him;
eyes, that we might see His glory;
hands, that we might serve Him;
feet, that we might run to do His will;
a mouth, that we might praise Him;
deep desires, that we might desire Him.

The Father's purpose has never changed.
His determination has never wavered,
despite our sin.
The sure destiny of all who trust in Christ is
to be like Him,
to be one with Him –
members of His own body,
His living temple,
His dearly-loved bride.

Jesus Christ is our Source, and
He is our eternal destination.

Christ, Our Source and Goal

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

A Christ-centered Year

During Advent, Jesus is the Promise of the Father.

During Christmas, He is the Gift of the Father. He is all the fullness of God embodied in a human infant.

During Epiphany, Jesus is the Light of the Father, drawing all people to Himself.

During Lent, He is the Father's Servant, leading us on the path of obedience and trust.

During Holy Week, Jesus is the Love of the Father, humbly submitting to death on the cross.

During Easter, He is the Life of the Father, overcoming death and sin forever.

On Ascension Day, Jesus is at the Father's right hand, reigning as Sovereign Lord and King.

On Pentecost, He pours out the Promise of the Father, baptizing every believer in the Holy Spirit of God.

On Trinity Sunday, Jesus ushers us into the full unity, love, and fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

During Ordinary Time, Jesus helps us order our lives by His teaching and example. He gives us His Spirit as a down-payment while we eagerly await His promised Advent.

On All Saints Day, Jesus unites us with all God's children of all nations and all ages.

On Christ the King Sunday, we rise up together and crown Jesus King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Brothers and sisters, let's constantly celebrate all God has done for us in Jesus Christ! Let's make this a Christ-centered year.

We Fix Our Eyes on Jesus Christ

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Promises of Christ's Coming

Before the Starry Universe

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Early Promises of Messiah

Read Genesis 3:14-19; 6:5-9; 8:18-22; 9:8-15; 12:1-3; Genesis 15:1-6

Hear God's promise to Adam and Eve.
Though they had just sinned away their perfect life,
 God was already beginning to unveil His plan of salvation.
He decreed that an age-long battle would ensue between Satan and
 Eve's descendants.
Then a descendant of Eve,
 a Son of Man,
would strike Satan's head,
 forever ending his destructive influence over our race.
With paradise destroyed only minutes before,
 God was already pointing us toward
 a Deliverer.

Hear God's promise to Noah.
The waters of judgment had just dissipated, and
 God was already promising that
 He would never again destroy all living creatures.
No matter how bad evil would become,
 death would not win.
 Life would win.
Holy God was committed to our redemption.
Just as He had saved the world
 because of and through
 one righteous man, Noah,
He would finally and completely save the world
 because of and through
 another Righteous Man,
 perfect and pleasing in His sight.
A Righteous Redeemer was coming.
Life would win!

Hear God's promises to Abraham.
God came to him making
lavish demands and
lavish promises.
God said, "Follow me!
Leave your homeland and all that is safe and familiar, and
begin a journey to a far-away country that I will show you.
Give up everything, and
simply trust Me.
I will make you a great nation.
I will bless you, and
I will bless all peoples of the earth through you."
Through Abraham, God would begin raising up
a great and mighty nation,
a nation spanning every place and time,
a people uniquely blessed
because they simply trust Sovereign God.
All God's lavish promises would come to full fruition in
the Author and Perfecter of Our Faith,
Jesus Christ.

All We Need

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

God's Promise to Moses

In Deuteronomy 18, as Moses neared the time of his death, he told the people of Israel:

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

"The LORD said to me:...'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites; I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.'" (vv.15, 17-19, NIV)

In Moses' day, the nations around Israel used various kinds of magic and superstitious practices to learn the will of the gods. God forbade such sorcery in Israel. He chose to

make His will known through His prophets. And unlike the mysterious messages of pagan soothsayers and mediums, God's words would be clear and understandable.

In the passage above, God is promising to raise up a succession of prophets who would faithfully speak His will to His people. We read the revelations of many of those prophets in our Old Testament. But when the prophets quit coming, the hopes aroused by Deuteronomy 18 began to focus on one Prophet who would come and fully reveal all God's will for His people. This one Prophet would be Messiah Himself.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, many saw Him as this promised Prophet:

John 1:45 records: *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* (NASB)

In John 6:14, when the people saw that Jesus had fed the five thousand, they said, *"This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."* (NASB)

And in John 7:40, when the people heard Jesus' teaching in the temple, they said, *"This certainly is the Prophet."* (NASB)

Peter, in speaking to the Jews about the One they had crucified, said:

"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer... For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you...' Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days." (Acts 3:17-18, 22, 24, NIV)

Jesus told those questioning His authority,

"If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me." (John 5:46, NASB)

And on the evening after His resurrection, Jesus conversed with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and *"beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures"* (Luke 24:27, NASB).

As the centuries progressed, God's prophets were distilled into God's Prophet, and God's words became God's Word, Jesus Christ. Hear Hebrews 1:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is

the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. (vv. 1-3, NIV)

*Father,
Your power, Your wisdom, and Your love
have said all they have to say
in Jesus Christ.
Help me to listen.*

The Word of God Is Jesus Christ (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

God's Promise to David

King David had wanted to build a temple, a house for God.
But God turned the tables on David.
Instead of David building a house for God, God answered that
He would build a house for David.
Hear God's words through the prophet Nathan:

"This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?

"The LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son...My love will never be taken away from him...Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:5, 11b-16, NIV)

To Adam, trapped by sin, God had promised a Deliverer.
To Noah, facing extermination, God had promised Life.
To Abraham, enduring the curse of childlessness,
God had promised Great Blessing and a Great Nation.
To Moses, struggling to lead a vast and rebellious people,
God had promised to faithfully speak His Word.

Now to David, Israel's greatest king, God promised a Kingdom.

His would be a lasting Kingdom.
To this mortal king, doomed to die,
 God promised a Throne that would never pass away.
The house God would build for David
 would be a line of rulers whose Kingdom would never end.
David's son would be God's own Son,
 loved from all eternity.
Solomon and the other kings of Judah would be a limited fulfillment of the promise.
God's promise would be complete in Jesus Christ.
The eternal Kingdom would come in Him.

In Christ we receive all God's gifts in their entirety,
 in all their richness,
 full strength and undiluted.
We receive His love in all its length, depth, breadth, and height.

*Father, my one ambition,
 my one treasure is
 Jesus Christ,
 for in Him I gain You,
 with all You are and all You give.*

The Golden Kingdom

Read 1 Kings 10:1-9

God blessed King Solomon with
 wisdom,
 wealth, and
 luxury beyond description.
Even other kings and queens,
 accustomed to all the best,
 found Solomon's kingdom beyond imagining.

But the whole story is not so glorious.
This wisest of kings married many foreign women, and
 they led him into idolatry.
Political and military troubles increased in his later years.
Solomon's son reaped the bitter fruit of some of Solomon's practices:
 ten of the tribes of Israel broke away and formed their own country,
 leaving Solomon's heirs with only two tribes to govern.
The Golden Kingdom was gone as quickly as it had come.
The wisest and richest of kings left a tarnished legacy.

But Solomon's kingdom,
 however imperfect and short-lived,
foreshadowed Christ and
 pointed us to Him.

The greatest of earthly wealth and wisdom proved to be
 only a foretaste of the boundless gifts
 God gives to His people in His Anointed One,
 Jesus Christ.

In Him

"are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3, NASB).

In Him

"something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42, NASB).

*Father, may what little I do,
no matter how flawed and temporary in itself,
point people to Jesus Christ.*

O Father, Give Us Jesus Christ

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The Blessings of the King

Read Isaiah 8:19 – 9:5

Isaiah spoke these words from God to a people who refused to trust Him. They preferred a religion more accommodating to their lifestyle, more touchable, more socially acceptable, one that catered to their desires. In troubled times when they needed help, they turned to another country, or another god, or to their own abilities or wealth. They consulted mediums, looking to the dead for help. Does any of this sound familiar?

Isaiah 8:21-22 describes the fate of all who worship "gods" that are not God. They feed on what can never satisfy them. The result is hunger, fear, darkness, anger, gloom, and ultimate disappointment. Desperate, they curse all authority. They ignore God their entire lives, then when tough times come, they blame Him. Rejecting Him, they have separated themselves from the only source of life and all that is good.

But look at the first word in the very next verse: “nevertheless” (Isaiah 9:1, NIV). God doesn’t reject us when we reject Him. His love pursues us. He doesn’t wait for us to deserve His gifts, or even to seek them. He longs to bless us, and He will not give up.

His blessings would begin among those who had suffered the most. Zebulun and Naphtali were the northernmost tribes of Israel, near the Sea of Galilee. Because of their location, they were the first to be attacked by invaders, who often came from the north, and they were the most subject to corruption from surrounding heathen nations.

Jesus was raised in this area and spent most of his life there. He grew up in Nazareth, as an adult moved to Capernaum, and began His ministry in the region of Galilee. (See Matthew 4:12-16.)

God was determined to lift these deluded, oppressed people. His words are bursting at the seams with promised blessings.

Imagine those who had long been engulfed in darkest gloom, now suddenly bathed in beautiful sunlight!

Imagine those consumed with anger and need, now caught up in utter joy—joy that surpasses even our greatest times of abundance and jubilation!

Imagine those long enslaved and oppressed, now suddenly set completely free! It would be as exhilarating as when Gideon delivered them from the Midianites, in Judges 6 & 7.

Imagine all the tools of war, conflict, suffering, and death being destroyed in one massive bonfire, never to be used again!

God was longing to give them a glimpse of a happiness that was beyond their imagining. Our world and our entire lives have been darkened by separation from God. We have no experience to help us grasp the light, the joy, and the freedom that our loving God plans to lavish on His people.

All these blessings would come to us in one perfect and surprising Gift!

*Focus on knowing and following
Jesus Christ.
All God’s blessings are coming to us in Him.*

Isaiah 9 (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Magnificence of the King

Read Isaiah 9:6-7; 16:5; 32:1-4

The previous portion of Isaiah 9, verses 2-5, spoke of a crescendo of incredible blessings: light, joy, abundance, freedom, victory, and peace. How would all these unimaginable gifts arrive?

Now the answer comes: a child, a son would be born. All our care, all our leadership and welfare would be on His shoulders. And what kind of leader, what kind of king would He be? If names could describe the true character and significance of a person, what would His names be? As the earlier passage struggled to communicate the depth and breadth of the gifts He would bring, here human language struggles to capture the majesty of all He is. His names would be:

Wonderful Counselor—His wisdom would be truly extraordinary!

Colossians 2:3 says that in Christ *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Mighty God—He would be a mighty warrior, a great champion. He would be Sovereign God.

Jesus...said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."
(Matthew 28:18, NIV)

Everlasting Father—This King would have the tenderness of a Father whose love is unfailing and forever.

Jesus said, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV)

Prince of Peace—Peace is not just the absence of conflict. It is a positive word, encompassing all the best of life: completeness, harmony, and well-being. It is full and unimpaired relationships in every aspect of life.

Philippians 4:7 promises this: *The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
(Philippians 4:7, NIV)

Incredible wisdom, sovereign power, unfailing love, and complete well-being—this King would bring us all the qualities of God Himself.

What's more, His rule and the peace He brings would continue to increase forever—not by force, but by justice and righteousness, by doing all that is good and right. The perfect will of our loving Father would blossom and grow in every life, throughout the universe.

These magnificent promises come with a guarantee, at the end of verse 7:

The deep, burning, unquenchable love of the Great I AM, Lord of all the Heavenly Armies, will do this!

Now that's a guarantee!

These verses promise what we deeply desire: the continual increase of His rule, His will, His character, and His peace in our minds, hearts, and lives. That process, that growth has begun already in everyone who trusts Him. The darkness is gone, and the Light has come. Here and now we are tasting His wisdom, His power, His unfailing love, and His deep peace, all through the Spirit of Jesus Christ within. And we are "*confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 1:6, NIV)

*Jesus Christ, our Brother, is
Lord of all things in this world and the next,
all things seen and unseen,
in heaven and earth.
We are secure and
eternally, extravagantly blessed in Him.*

Antiphonal Carol

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The Ultimate King

Read Psalm 72

Psalm 72 is a royal psalm, probably written as a prayer for the king's coronation. Its heading or title is literally "Of Solomon" in the original Hebrew. This could mean that it was written by him, for him, about him, or that it belonged to him. Down through the centuries, most have considered it a prayer by David for his son, Solomon.

So what does a royal psalm have to do with Messiah? God guaranteed that David would always have a descendant ruling as king. Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, such as Isaiah 9:1-7, say that Messiah will be the final fulfillment of this promise. Thus the royal psalms, though originally written about an earthly king, find their ultimate fulfillment in the ultimate King, Jesus Christ.

With that in mind, notice what Psalm 72 tells us about Christ's reign:

1. He will be gifted with God's own justice and rightness. What higher prayer or praise could we ever have for our leader than that He always be completely just and right as God Himself is just and right?
2. Prosperity – people always want their leader to bring them prosperity. Under Christ, creation itself will pour out on His people all the natural, lavish, overflowing fruitfulness of its Creator. Christ will bring the fullness of all God's blessings, all that the Father's heart ever wanted for His children.
3. Unlike many leaders, His friends won't be the rich oppressors. He will crush them. Those nearest to Him will be the weak, helpless, and needy. Christ will be their Champion.
4. He will rule forever. Other human kings are limited by human weakness. They come and go, they fade and die. Christ breathes the unending, unlimited life of God. He and His Kingdom are forever.
5. Christ will not simply be a Jewish king, or the Lord for Christians or for one country alone. He will be Sovereign Ruler of the entire earth, King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords.

Christ will be the Ultimate King: universal and eternal, bringing overflowing prosperity and God's perfect justice to everyone, everywhere, including the most helpless among us. In Him the highest hopes of heaven and earth will forever become reality.

*If you want to see your future,
look at Jesus Christ.
We will be
like Him,
with Him, and
in Him,
completely and forever.*

Hallelujah Hymn

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Kingdom of Peace

Read Isaiah 11:1-9

Peace begins in God.
It begins with His completeness in Himself and
with the love and perfect unity among the
Father, Son, and Spirit.

Peace comes to us in Christ.
He who is one with the Father and
one with the Spirit became
one of us.
And as we simply trust Him, like children,
He becomes one *with* us.

When Christ has finished what He has started,
when we are one with Him, we will be
one with the Father and
one with the Spirit as well.
As we are one with them,
we will also be one with each other,
and the peace of God will be perfect and complete.

Creation itself will then be transformed.

As Romans 8 says:

*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.
For the creation was subjected to frustration...
in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and
brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (vv.19-21, NIV)*

Peace will reign in all creation:
no more disharmony; only
unity,
contentment,
completeness, and
well-being;
full, open, fruitful, unimpaired relationships throughout all reality.
Just imagine!

Beauty and truth,
pleasure and purity,
humanity and holiness,
justice and mercy, will be
 full and in perfect harmony,
just as they have always been
 full and in perfect harmony in God.

Art and science,
celebration and reflection,
giving and receiving,
worship and play
will simply be facets of being
 in Him
 constantly and completely.

Everyone will be
beautiful in their God-breathed individuality.
We will be
 like Him,
 with Him, and
 complete in Him
forever.

O come, Prince of Peace!

Sweet Peace

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The Shepherd King

Read Isaiah 40:9-11; Micah 5:2-5; Ezekiel 34:2-5, 20-24

Sheep and shepherds were a fixture of daily life in biblical times. Everyone was familiar with them. Thus “shepherds” was a common figure of speech for leaders, from kings on down. These “shepherds” were to lead their flock to food and water. They were to provide protection for everyone and special care for those who needed it.

But not all shepherds took their jobs seriously. Ezekiel spoke of leaders who cared for themselves rather than the flock. The *fed on* the flock rather than *feeding* the flock.

Through both Ezekiel and the prophet Micah, God said that He would not stand by while His flock was neglected. The unfaithful shepherds would be judged and struck down.

But He would not leave His people without a shepherd. Both prophets said that God would send a Greater Shepherd, His own Anointed One, Messiah, who would shepherd His people as Loving God desired. This Great Shepherd would be from the line of King David, who himself had been a shepherd.

In fact, says Micah, this Shepherd would come from David's home town, Bethlehem. This tiny village, insignificant by human standards, would provide a second great leader, even greater than King David. God said this leader would come as God's own agent, not man's choice. His origins would be "from of old, from ancient times"; that is, He would be part of God's timeless plan, working since before the foundation of the world. This Leader would "*stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.*" His power would not be limited by human weakness but would be the power and authority of Sovereign God Himself. God's people would finally live in total security, and the King's rule would reach "*to the ends of the earth*".

This King would not simply *bring* peace. He Himself would *be* their peace. Over 700 years later the Apostle Paul would say the same of Jesus Christ,
He himself is our peace. (Ephesians 2:14, NIV)

How appropriate that when Jesus came and was opposed by the false shepherds of His day, He characterized Himself this way:

I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11, NIV)

To our picture of the mighty Messiah King, the Shepherd King brings a personal flavor, a tenderness, an individual attention that all who know Jesus Christ will recognize immediately.

Jesus said, "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*" (John 10:27-28, NIV)

Father, Jesus Christ is my shepherd.

His every word is love, and

His every path leads to You.

Peace, Peace, Peace

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The Servant King

Read Isaiah 42:1-4

Hear the affection and enthusiasm in God's voice as He talks about this Special One. God takes particular delight in Him. Note that this is the same way God spoke of Jesus at His baptism, when Jesus was revealed in His humility (Luke 3:21-22), and at His transfiguration, when Jesus was revealed in His glory (Luke 9:35).

God says that He himself has chosen Him, and He will uphold Him. He will equip Him with His own Spirit (see also Isaiah 11:2).

This Chosen One will need this equipping, for His task is a huge one: to establish justice on earth. He will fully establish God's will, God's rightness, God's own character, throughout all creation, in every aspect of society, in every human relationship, and within every heart. He will rid a very unjust world and a very unjust people of all injustice. What a responsibility!

But notice that God calls Him "my Servant." Elsewhere in Isaiah He describes Him as a Mighty Deliverer and the King of All Kings, One who would rule completely, everywhere and forever (Isaiah 9:6). A sovereign king and a servant? This seems like a strange combination of descriptions for the same person.

But think of the qualities of a good servant:

- obedient
- humble, not calling attention to himself.
- selfless, focused only on the agenda and will of his master;
- single-minded, completely devoted to the task

These qualities match the way the Servant will approach His task. Though the work seems overwhelming, notice the unlikely way He will accomplish it.

- He will not shout or cry out.
- He will not raise His voice in the streets or call attention to himself.
- He will be so gentle that He won't break a bent blade of grass nor snuff out the final smoldering of a candle wick.

What a way to conquer the world! Social activists plan public protests and shout their causes in the streets. Politicians spend millions of dollars to fill every communications medium with their voices and images. Conquerors mount military campaigns with brute force, crushing anyone who gets in their way.

This Leader, this Conqueror is humble and gentle and refuses self-promotion. But don't mistake His methods for weakness. He will not falter. He will not be discouraged. And He will fully accomplish His task.

This is my favorite Old Testament picture of Christ. This is the Servant I see in the gospels: single-minded, obedient to His Father, completely dependent on Him, and

totally devoted to His will and His glory. He doesn't call attention to Himself. In fact, we're told that when He healed people, He demanded that they not spread the word about what He had done for them (see Matthew 12:15-21).

He was humble. He came as seemingly the illegitimate son of a peasant girl. He was born in a stable and cradled in an animals' feeding trough because He had no other place. As an adult, He traveled the country without a home. He operated outside human authority. He was as an outcast, scorned as a heretic and a madman. And though completely non-violent and non-political, He was brutally executed as an enemy of church and state.

Yet He will succeed where all others have failed. He will conquer the earth forever and establish perfect justice everywhere, at every level, in every human heart.

This is the Savior I know. I recognize Him. This is the way He works in my life. He is so very gentle and patient, yet so persistent and faithful. I have failed more times than I care to remember. I'm such a slow learner. But He never gets impatient with me or in a rush. He doesn't give up on me, and He doesn't leave me in my sin. He continues to work to establish God's beautiful rightness in absolutely every corner of my life.

What a King! What a Servant! What a Savior!

*Father, let all I am be consumed by a passion
to glorify Jesus Christ.
I want everyone to fully realize
just how marvelous He is!*

See the Servant

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The Priest King

Read Psalm 110

As a royal Psalm, Psalm 110 was originally written about an earthly Hebrew king. But since Jesus Christ is the ultimate King, the eternal heir to David's throne, He is the ultimate fulfillment of these psalms. The Apostle Paul and the writer of the book of Hebrews both applied this Psalm to Jesus, as did Jesus Himself. (See 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 5:6; Matthew 22:41-46).

Here God has made a number of powerful promises to His Messiah, Jesus:

1. God will subjugate every one of Jesus' enemies (vv.1, 5-6).
2. He will give Him absolute power and authority, even in the midst of those who oppose Him (v.2).
3. Messiah's people will provide a vast and willing army, magnificent in their array, covering the ground like dew, all giving their very best to their King (v.3).

But perhaps the most intriguing promise is in v.4, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." To get the full background on Melchizedek, read Genesis 14. During a war among local kings, Abraham's nephew, Lot, was taken captive, along with all his possessions. Abraham raised an army of 318 trained men of war just from those born in his household. (Now that's a vast estate!) Abraham's household army joined with other allies and pursued the four offending kings, defeated them and brought back Lot along with all the other plunder.

Hebrews 7 summarizes Melchizedek's part in the story:

Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. (7:1-2a, NIV; see also Genesis 14:17-20)

Since the Genesis account says nothing about Melchizedek's human lineage, which was normally a requirement for the priesthood, Hebrews goes on to say this:

Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! (Hebrews 7:3, NIV)

And in response to Abraham being blessed by Melchizedek, Hebrews adds:

And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. (7:7, NIV)

Melchizedek was both a king and a priest, even though by human lineage he didn't qualify as a priest. The Bible gives no word of his origins or his dying but surrounds him with a mysterious, other-worldly air. Even the great Abraham respected his authority.

Then what does Psalm 110 mean when it says that Messiah is "a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek"? Since Messiah came from the tribe of Judah rather than Levi, He did not qualify as a priest by human standards, just as Melchizedek did not. But God made Christ high priest by direct, everlasting appointment. He is "a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life" (Hebrews 7:16, NIV). Besides being the Ultimate King, Messiah is the Great High Priest, representing God to His people, and His people to God. He is our mediator. 1 Timothy 2:5 says:

There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (NIV)

We are weak and needy, unholy and unworthy. God is the boundless source of life, love, and all that is good. As our High Priest, Jesus Christ brings us to our Father and our Father to us, forever uniting God and humanity, earth and heaven.

*Father, our future is all in Jesus Christ.
He is our completeness,
our holiness, and
our boundless life.
Today we fix our hearts on Him.*

Our Destiny Is Jesus Christ (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Son of God *Read Psalm 2*

Psalm 2 is another royal psalm. It was originally written about an earthly king, but its ultimate fulfillment is in the Ultimate King, Messiah.

The opening verses paint a sobering picture. Imagine all the most powerful forces on earth combining all their resources toward just one goal: destroying God's people.

Because many of us live in a stable country that guarantees religious freedom and makes reasonable efforts to protect us from violence, we sometimes have trouble identifying with psalms like Psalm 2. We are not threatened with violent persecution for our beliefs. No enemy armies are massing at our border.

But never forget that Satan is constantly, completely opposed to God, His purposes, and His people. He is especially opposed to Jesus Christ, God's Son and Anointed One. Satan enlists all those he influences in this constant, determined opposition. Sometimes his opposition is violent, either through military confrontation or through persecution. When necessary, his opposition is more subtle, taking the form of intellectual, cultural, and social pressure. But whether his methods are overt or hidden, his goal is always the same: the destruction of God's people and all His plans.

So what is God's response to the threat of Satan and all his gathered forces? He laughs! He makes fun of them! He ridicules them! He is not frightened – He's amused! Then He terrifies them by speaking in His burning fury: *"I have installed MY KING on His holy throne! HE is in complete control!"*

Immediately Messiah Himself speaks up, in vv.7-9, and talks about His installation by God.

*He said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have become your Father." (v.7)*

The King that God has enthroned is not just His Chosen One. It is His own Son.

This is not the first time God has expressed His fierce love for His own child. Earlier in the Old Testament, He spoke of the people of Israel as His firstborn son. God sent Moses, a lowly shepherd from the backside of the desert, to the most powerful ruler on earth. He came demanding that Pharaoh give up the people of Israel, his massive slave-labor force. God's instructions to Moses were this:

*"Say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says:
Israel is my **firstborn son**...
Let **my son** go.'" (Exodus 4:22-23, NIV)*

Before the confrontation was over, Egypt's first-born sons all lay dead, and God's "firstborn son" was free.

God's miraculous care for His first-born continued as they spent 40 years in a vast and barren desert, then faced the task of conquering occupied Canaan. Moses comforted Israel with these words:

*"Do not be terrified...The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, **as a father carries his son**, all the way you went until you reached this place." (Deuteronomy 1:29-31, NIV)*

Later, after they were settled in their own land, God gave them David as their king, a man after His own heart. Notice how God describes His love for David, even in all his frailty:

*"My faithful love will be with him...
He will call out to me, '**You are my Father**...'
I will appoint him **my firstborn**,
the most exalted of the kings of the earth.
I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.
I will establish his line forever,*

his throne as long as the heavens endure.”
(Psalm 89:24, 26-29, NIV)

A thousand years later, Jesus Christ came, not only as the promised Son of David, but as the only-begotten Son of God. He is the King spoken of here in Psalm 2. God has appointed Him sovereign, eternal ruler of all the universe. No force in heaven or earth, seen or unseen, can challenge His power and authority.

Almighty God loves Him with the burning, unquenchable love of a Father for His only child. He is our King, now and forever. In Him, we are bold, confident, and secure in the face of every threat, every hardship, and every uncertainty.

*Father, You are sovereign over all reality.
You speak, and it is so.
Why do we hesitate to trust You?
Why are we ever afraid?*

Psalm 2

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Son of Man

Read Daniel 7:1, 9-10, 13-14

Daniel 7 records Daniel's dream, his visions of the future. Four fantastic beasts arise from the sea, each representing a different kingdom that would come and exercise authority for awhile, then pass away.

As the fourth beast is ruling and raging boastfully, the scene changes. Now Daniel sees a vision of the throne room of the universe. God, the Ancient of Days, is ruling in unearthly splendor, surrounded by vast multitudes.

Then Daniel witnesses a stunning, almost unbelievable sight. Into this highest, holiest heaven, a human being, a "son of man," arrives on the clouds and is led into the presence of the Ancient of Days. He is given glory, sovereign authority, and eternal power over all people on earth.

Imagine: a “son of man”, a human being, a member of our rebellious race, is gloriously escorted into God’s holy presence and given sovereign, universal authority that will never pass away.

While Jesus walked this earth, what was His favorite designation for Himself? It was “Son of Man”. This eternal, glorious, divine Being, who had been in the Father’s presence from the beginning, chose to refer to Himself as the “Son of Man”. He gladly embraced His humanity. He willingly shared our suffering and our curse of death, knowing that when He returned to the Father’s presence, He would bring a countless train of redeemed human beings with Him.

When He is finally crowned, we will be there. We will reign with Him and share His magnificence and His glory. Never again will anyone say, “I am only human”. Our curse will be gone forever.

*Father,
Creator,
Sovereign Savior,
thank You for all that we are becoming in Jesus Christ!*

See All That Human Can Be

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

God with Us

Read Isaiah 7:1-16

Matthew 1:23 is quoting Isaiah 7:14 when it says:

*The virgin will be with child and
will give birth to a son, and
they will call him "Immanuel"—
which means, "God with us." (NIV)*

Isaiah chapter 7 describes a dark time for the Jewish nation, Judah. They were under a serious threat from an alliance of their neighbors.

God sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz, King of Judah, to tell him to hold steady and not be afraid, for the threat would come to nothing. God even asked Ahaz to choose a sign – any sign he wanted – and God would perform it to assure him of His promise.

But Ahaz was wicked and faithless. He didn't believe God's promise and refused to ask for a sign.

Instead of walking away, God took the initiative. He himself chose a sign – a promise of His care and provision for His people. The sign: a special child would be born. The child's very name would express God's care. It would be "Immanuel," which means "God with us." God promised that before this child was old enough to choose right from wrong, the nations now threatening Judah would be completely destroyed.

This prophecy was probably first fulfilled in a child born at the time. His birth was a sign of God's presence and protection in that situation.

There is much we are not told about this child. But the Bible does tell us, in Matthew 1:23, that this prophecy was fulfilled in a greater way by the coming of Jesus. Jesus had much in common with the "Immanuel" of Isaiah 7:

1. Jesus' birth was shrouded in mystery.
2. Jesus was a sign of God's loving action to deliver His people. He was a living message, a walking signpost assuring everyone that God was in control, and God was keeping His promises.
3. Jesus came, not as a reward for our faith, but entirely at God's initiative, in spite of our unbelief.
4. Jesus' name and His coming brought comfort and assurance: God is with us! Jesus was the fulfillment of God's longstanding promise to His people: "I will be with you always."

In the midst of our trouble, in the face of our unbelief, God has come to us. God's love is a Person. God's gift is Himself: Jesus Christ.

*Father, in Jesus Christ
You have showered on us all Your best gifts,
all that we need for life, peace, and godliness.*

God with Us, Immanuel (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Pictures of the Messiah

Read Psalm 72:5, 8; Isaiah 40:9-11; 42:2-4

When we think of Christ at Christmas,
we picture an infant in a manger.

But that is only one small part of
the living, eternal Christ.

The Psalms and the prophets draw many pictures of
all He is and
all He is to us.

He is a king,
a warrior,
a mighty champion,
a priest,
a prophet,
a shepherd, and
a servant who suffers willingly, horribly for His people.

He is the glory of God,
a light to the nations,
the cornerstone chosen and precious.

As you think of Him this Advent and Christmas,
as you celebrate Him,
celebrate all He is and
all He is to you.

Christ Is Come

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The All-in-all Christ

In the Old Testament, God promised that
from David's line would rise
the Messiah, meaning "the Anointed One" (in Greek, "Christ").
Messiah would be a great King who would reign
everywhere and forever
in perfect wisdom, power, justice, and peace.

Daniel prophesied (in 7:9-14) that
a Son of Man – that is, a human being --
would come to the throne room of heaven.
There he would receive an
everlasting, universal kingdom.

In Genesis 14:17-20, we meet Melchizedek,
a “priest of God Most High”.
Even the great Abraham paid a tithe to him.
His priesthood was more ancient than
that from the line of Aaron.
He was a mysterious figure,
with no recorded parentage or death.

Through Moses, God promised that in the future,
He would raise up a Prophet who would
speak God’s will with a human voice (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).
He would speak God’s own words clearly,
for all to understand.

And Isaiah prophesied that God would send
His own Servant
to suffer horribly for the sins of the people (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12).

Messiah, Son of Man, Great High Priest, Prophet, and Suffering Servant –
Old Testament saints knew of
these five figures
whom God would someday send
in His plan of salvation.
But no one seemed to understand that
these five figures would all be
One Person:
His own Son, Jesus.

Prophecies of Christ

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Hannah

Read 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11, 18-21

I read the story of Hannah, and I am struck by the similarities between her and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

- Both bore deep, personal shame regarding child-bearing. Child-bearing was considered the most precious privilege of womanhood. But for each woman, this privilege had turned to utter disgrace. Hannah was childless, and Mary was pregnant outside of marriage.
- In the community and culture in which they lived, their shame was very public and oppressive. Many no doubt considered them cursed by God.
- In reality, their conditions were God's doing, and they bore their suffering in His service. Both women were godly and righteous. Out of their deep, personal shame grew a deep, personal relationship with the Living God.
- Both women were supported by godly husbands.
- When their shame was broken by the gift of a son, each woman expressed her praise to God in exuberant song. Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) seems to have inspired Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Each exulted in the truth that our loving and just God is wonderfully sovereign in all human affairs.
- Both women knew that their treasured sons, born through such suffering and public shame, actually belonged to God. Each mother consecrated her son back to the Lord.
- Even as children, Samuel and Jesus shared an affinity for God's house, one that shaped their entire lives.

I am moved as I read of Hannah's pain. When praying for a son, she was so distraught that the priest thought she was drunk (1 Samuel 1:12-18). Then as soon as her son was weaned, she left him in Shiloh with the priest Eli, only to see him briefly once a year from then on. We can only imagine the feelings that were flooding this mother's heart.

Such humble godliness is the womb in which each of these great men was nurtured. Seeing Hannah, we get a glimpse of Mary. And seeing the mighty things God did through Samuel, we catch a dim foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

I Am Your Servant (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Shadows of Christ

Romans 5:14 says:

Adam...was a pattern of the one to come. (NIV)

And from Colossians 2:17:

*These are a shadow of the things that were to come;
the reality, however, is found in Christ. (NIV)*

In the Old Testament, not all portraits of the coming Messiah were painted by the words of prophets. Some were painted by the lives of God's people. Living individuals became sign posts pointing us toward Jesus Christ. As we saw God working through them, we caught glimpses of the way He would work through His Son.

Notice how these lives paralleled the coming Messiah.

- ADAM was the first of the human race, as Christ is the first of a new, holy humanity. Adam introduced sin. Christ introduced righteousness.
- Like Christ, NOAH pleased God in a time when sin seemed overwhelming and inevitable. Because of him and through him, God saved our race from destruction.
- Like Christ, ABRAHAM trusted God, and through him God created a people uniquely His own. In him all nations on earth were blessed.
- Like Christ, MOSES was God's instrument for leading His people out of bondage. He served as deliverer, leader, prophet, and mediator.
- JOSHUA shared Jesus' own name, and like Him, led God's people into their promised land. ("Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua".)
- Like his Greater Son, DAVID was lifted from humble beginnings to become a glorious leader of God's people. He was a man after God's own heart, and God considered him His own son (Psalm 89:26-27).

- Foreshadowing Jesus Christ, MELCHIZEDEK was a priest of the Most High God by divine appointment, not by birth. His name means, “King of Righteousness”. In the Old Testament account he is greater even than Abraham, “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God” (Hebrews 7:3, NIV).

The Old Testament includes many others whose lives paralleled and pre-figured Christ. Here are just a few:

- ENOCH “walked with God” and left this world without facing death, being taken up directly into God’s presence. (Genesis 5:22-24)
- ISAAC was a long-promised son and heir, miraculously born and later offered up by his father as a sacrifice. (Genesis, chapters 15 and 21 – 22)
- JOSEPH endured betrayal, injustice, and great suffering, then was dramatically exalted to a high position. From that position he saved his family and his entire nation from death. (Genesis, chapters 37 – 50)
- BOAZ willingly accepted responsibility as the kinsman-redeemer of his people and thereby became an ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ. (Ruth 3 & 4)
- SAMUEL was miraculously born by God’s promise and was wholly dedicated to God’s service before birth. Though not of the priestly tribe, he was God’s chosen mediator between Himself and His people. (1 Samuel)

As we consider these lives and others, we see shadows of the coming Messiah. We catch passing glimpses of how the high and holy God would incarnate Himself in flesh and blood. Their faith and God’s faithfulness to them prepare our hearts for His fullness so beautifully revealed in the Living Christ.

*Father, the human race is like a prism.
Through it we begin to see Your life
exploded into its full range of
color, variety, and dazzling beauty.
Shine through us,
Glorious Father!*

Prepare Us (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

You Come to Me

You come
 comforting me,
 forgiving me,
 recreating me,
 giving me a destiny.

You come
 teaching me,
 healing me,
 nourishing me, and
 sharing Yourself with me.

Though infinitely above me, You come to be
 all around me,
 all within me,
 ever before me,
 ever beside me.

Almighty, all-holy, all-loving God,
 You wrap me in Your presence,
enabling me to
 speak and
 live and
 be like You.

Praise to You!

Isaiah 40
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

About the Christ

The Christ of Advent

During Advent, Jesus is the Promise of the Father.

No matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ.

(2 Corinthians 1:20, NIV)

Think of our God, unlimited by time and place,
all-seeing,
ever-present.

Everywhere and
all eternity are
the domain in which He dwells.

He is complete and
perfect, so
He does not change.

His Word is sovereign.
All reality responds to His will.
He speaks, and it is so.

For this God, His eternal purposes are
certain and
complete.

They are not future possibilities.
They are present reality.

But we are small and fearful,
bound by time,
creatures of the now.

We see only ourselves and
our tiny sliver of all that is.

God's greatest blessings are
too vast,
too broad in time.

We cannot trace His love and
all its magnificent ways.

But our loving Father longs to wrap us in
the beautiful certainty of
all He is and

all He does.

So He makes promises that let us
glimpse His love
beyond our now.

His promises assure us of unchanging truth, that
God will always be who He has always been;
He will always do what He has always done; and
He will complete all He has started.

God's promises are not
empty words,
rosy wishes, or
mere intention.

God's promises describe
eternal reality.

And now, God's promises are
a Person,
a living, human, divine Person
who embodies
all God has done and
all He is doing for His children.

During Advent, look to Jesus.
He is the Promise of the Father.
As He is,
we will be.

Complete in Jesus Christ (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Promises

During Advent we see Jesus, not as flesh and blood reality, but as a promise, a hope, a silhouette of our coming salvation. During Christmas He is still a helpless baby who only does what babies do. Yet even before the human Jesus did anything, simply through His coming, He painted a beautiful portrait of our God:

- This God has worked for millennia to save us from death and bring us back to Himself. His plan was born long before we were, and it will continue until it is completed.
- While we wait for that completion, He encourages and draws us through promises. And He carefully keeps every promise, even when the wait seems endless. Christ's birth proves that God keeps His promises. Be assured that His promised second coming will happen as well.
- God describes Himself in terms we can understand. But no description, no name, no combination of roles does Him justice. He is a King, yet a Servant...a Mighty Warrior, yet a Shepherd. He is both Prophet and Priest...a powerful Lion and a Lamb to be slaughtered. Our God overflows all these descriptions.
- God is also a patient gardener. He loves to grow things! He is growing for us a life that is deep and rich and fruitful beyond our wildest imaginings. But it starts from a tiny seed and must grow slowly and naturally. We have to nurture it. We have to wait for it.
- Beyond all these, first and foremost, our God is a Father.
- This Father dearly loves "ordinary" people. He loves them as His own children.
- God embraces human life from the roots up. This 100% God became 100% human that we might become 100% like Him.

*Father, Your Son came
all the way to where I am
so that He might lead me
all the way to You.
Help me never to neglect
so great a gift!*

Knowing God (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Word

Read John 1:1-5

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.*

Jesus Is the Word

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
(John 1:1)*

John 1:1 refers to Jesus as “the Word”.

But what does it mean by that?

Let’s start with the dictionary.

It says that a word is

a unit of language that carries meaning.

Since a word carries meaning, it can convey
information or intent.

It can express

knowledge or desire.

Because we humans are weak (in comparison to God),
our words are weak. They are little more than empty breath.

They express our imperfect knowledge and
our feeble intentions.

But sovereign God is

perfect in power,
perfect in wisdom, and
perfect in love.

His word is “the Word”.

As we see in Genesis 1,

His word is as almighty as He is.

He speaks, and through His Word alone,

His will is brought to reality:

God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (NASB)

But John 1 adds a new dimension to the Genesis 1 story.

It says that Jesus Christ Himself is that

sovereign, all-powerful, creative Word.

He brings to reality all the Father’s expressed will,

all His plans and promises.

All that the Father’s love imagines,

all the life, all the light,

all the riches of His being,

are born in our world

and in us

through Jesus Christ.

Christ the Word

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Christ the Light

Darkness:

separation from Light
ignorance
uncertainty
suffering
fear
lostness
grief
death

Light:

the presence of God
truth
knowing
complete well-being
joy
belonging
love
life

*The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.
For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of armies will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7, NASB)*

In him was life, and

*that life was the light of all mankind.
The light shines in the darkness, and
the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5, NIV)*

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said,
"I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life." (John 8:12, NIV)*

*The city [New Jerusalem] has no need of
the sun or of the moon to shine on it,
for the glory of God has illuminated it, and
its lamp is the Lamb. (Revelation 21:23, NASB)*

Christ the Light (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Unthinkable! *Read John 1:1, 14*

Unthinkable!
How could a human being claim to be divine?
Compare us even to this tiny world of ours,
 this grain-of-sand in the universe, and
we are so small,
 so incredibly brief.
A snap of the fingers,
 a puff of air, and
we are gone.
And like a child who invests his few pennies on candy,
 we waste our meager moments on
 "riches" even more shallow and futile than we are.
Blind...arrogant...self-centered...and corrupt.
DIVINE?

Unthinkable!
Try to fully imagine our Sovereign Creator.
"God" is too small a word for Him!
He overflows this sprawling universe

like an ocean overflows a tea cup.
Would such a Being pour Himself
undiminished and undiluted
into our flesh and bone?
All of HIM poured into US?
Would He come here and share
our helplessness...our grief...our abuse of each other?
Would He come and live His life beside us
here in the shadow of death?

Unthinkable!

*Imagine moving to the
poorest, least comfortable place on earth and
living among them,
fully sharing their lives,
in order to help them know God.
Christ's sacrifice in the incarnation was
infinitely greater.
But He did it joyfully,
taking on all our humanity in order to
lead us to the Father.*

God Comes

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

How God Came

In this troubled world, pounded by
evil,
struggle,
sorrow, and
death,
we cry out with Isaiah:
God, tear open the heavens and come down!
Even the mountains quake in Your presence! (Isaiah 64:1-2, para.)

We read Exodus 19 about how God's people experienced Him
when He came down on Mt. Sinai:

thunder and lightning,
a thick cloud,
a loud trumpet sound,
fire and smoke.

All the people
and the mountain itself
trembled with fear.

When Holy God was there,
even touching the mountain
would bring death.

In the Old Testament, God's people were forbidden to craft
any image or likeness of Him.

Any earthly image of the transcendent God
made Him far less than He was: a

boundless,
Almighty,
eternal Spirit,

existing

long before and
high above

anything earthly.

But when He came down at Christmas,
He made Himself a creature,
flesh and blood.

He went through the birth process
just like all the rest of us.

More than that, He came as the
weakest,
lowest,
most humble

of all human beings:

the newborn infant of
an unmarried peasant girl.

The Eternal, Almighty Word made Himself a
crying,
wordless,
helpless baby.

Transcendent God laid aside everything.

He emptied Himself,
humbled Himself,
gave Himself without reservation
to fully embrace us with
all that He is.

His restless love would stop at nothing less.

This Christmas,
 be reminded,
 be assured
that no matter what comes,
 Almighty God is with you!
 Almighty God is for you!

How God Came

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

The Uncrossable Gap

God is holy.
 We were born into sin.
 It is all we have ever known.

God is pure light.
 As creatures of the darkness,
 we instinctively run from Him.

God is love.
 In our selfishness
 we are suspicious of Him.

God is Spirit.
 To us physical creatures,
 He seems unreal.

God is perfect wisdom.
 To our ignorance,
 He seems foolish.

God is all in all, and He offers Himself to us freely and completely.
 In ourselves, we cannot see,
 cannot know, and
 cannot accept Him.

But now God has crossed all the barriers between Him and us.
The Transcendent One has taken flesh and blood.
Holy God is now and forever
 wholly human.
He has come all the way to us in Jesus Christ.

*Father,
You have removed everything that separates
You and me.
I don't want to hold You at arm's length any longer.
Help me to know You and trust You completely.*

You Came to Us (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The I AM

Jesus Christ is *the Word become flesh* (John 1:14).
He is *the image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1:15).
He is *all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form* (Colossians 2:9).
He is *the radiance of the Father's glory and
 the exact representation of His very being* (Hebrews 1:3).

Holy God is now human.
The Almighty shares our weakness.
Our Sovereign is a humble servant.
The Unapproachable One grants us unlimited access.
The Transcendent, the Incomprehensible, the Unimaginable
 has come to us, and
 we see Him face to face.

Mystery and intimacy,
power and dependence,
time and eternity
are seamlessly combined in Him.

The Unknowable is knowable
 by childlike faith alone.

The glory of the Infinite God,
of whom the vast universe is only a passing glimpse and a faint whisper,
is fully revealed in this One.

He shares with us
His wisdom,
His heart,
His breath, and
His peace.

He welcomes us with open arms,
holds us gently in His hand,
lovingly speaks our name, and
calls Himself our Brother.

All that the Father has,
all that He is, and
all the gifts of His magnificent Being
are ours forever in this One:
Jesus Christ.

*Holy Father,
in Jesus Christ
You have removed all the barriers
between You and me.*

We Can Know Our God Transcendent

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Father Shares His Fullness

Luke 11:5-13; Ephesians 3:14-19; Colossians 2:9-10

We parents are weak and limited in so many ways.
Though we love our children,
there is much we simply do not have and
thus cannot give them.
Yet we gladly pass on to them whatever we can.
But more importantly, day by day,
without even thinking about it,

we share with them all that we are.

Father, You are the perfect parent,
infinitely greater than all that the best human parent
can even aspire to be.

All that exists is Yours,
so there is no limit to what You can give Your children.

You are complete and perfect in Yourself,
so there is no limit to the gifts and graces You can impart to them.

And You are perfect in love.
No selfishness ever taints or limits Your giving.

You joyfully, unreservedly share with Your children
all that You have and
all that You are.

Almighty God, You share Yourself with us!

You fully incarnated
Your pure and perfect Son
in our human flesh

so that through Him,
we might share in You.

You breathe into us
Your own Spirit,
Your own

holy,
boundless,
eternal life

that we might be filled forever with
all the fullness of God Himself.

Praise to You, magnificent Father,
infinite in greatness,
infinite in goodness,
infinite in love!

Fullness of God

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

You Give Yourself

Father, we go through life bathed in Your blessings –
big blessings,
small blessings,
special blessings,
constant blessings.

And yet even at Christmas,
how rarely do we thank You for Your greatest blessing.

Father, thank You for
Your life,
Your love,
Your goodness,
Your holiness,
Your light,
Your joy.

Thank You for allowing us to share in
all You are
forever.

Thank You for
JESUS!

You Give Yourself

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

My Holy and Human Brother

Lord Jesus, You bring God within my reach.
You are flesh and blood like me.
You experienced life here as I experience it, in all its
weakness,
pain,
struggle, and
imperfection.

Yet in You I see the transcendent God,
and in a form I can understand and

trust.

Almighty, sovereign God is real to me in You.
I can begin to relate to Him in You.

Holiness is also real to me in You.
I would never conceive of holy living,
never dream of it or
desire it,
until I saw it
so beautiful and
desirable

in You.

And as I trust You,
You bring holiness into my
innermost heart and
outermost living.

You make *me* holy!
I can hardly even imagine it, and
yet it is true.

You prove to me that I can be both
human and
holy.

You prove to me that I can be a true child of God
here and now,
in this present, evil world.

You prove it by Your living example.
You prove it by giving me Your own Holy Spirit
to live and breathe and desire within me.

And You promise that
what You have begun,
You will finish, beautifully and completely.

Praise to You, Jesus,
my holy and human Brother!

*On a human level, "holiness" seems
uncomfortable,
unreasonable, and
unreachable.
But the Spirit of Jesus makes us like Jesus
as we trust Him step by step.
We are holy as we trust Him.*

Holy, Human Jesus Christ (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christ in Genesis and Exodus

In Genesis, at the very beginning, when God spoke the universe into existence, Jesus Christ was that sovereign, creative Word. All that the Father willed, the Word brought to reality (Genesis 1; John 1:1-18).

Christ was the deliverer God promised to Adam and Eve. He was their descendant who would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15).

Christ was the rainbow's promise to Noah that in the face of overwhelming evil, life would always triumph (Genesis 8:21; 9:8-17).

Christ was the heir promised to Abraham and the sacrifice God provided in place of Isaac (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:4; 22:8, 14).

Jesus Christ is our Great High Priest. Melchizedek and the entire Old Testament priesthood pointed ahead to Him (Genesis 14:17-20; Hebrews 7; 10:19-23).

In the Exodus, Christ was the Passover lamb. Through His blood God's people were saved from death (Exodus 12). Christ was the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16) and the Bread of the Presence (Exodus 25:30). His life was the completion of the entire sacrificial system and won forgiveness for all our race (Hebrews 10:11-14).

Jesus Christ fulfilled Sinai's law for all of us (Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4). Moses saw the back of God for a few seconds (Exodus 33:18-23; 34:1-7). In Christ we see Him face-to-face and are changed into His glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Tabernacle in the wilderness feasted our senses on reminders of God's presence (Exodus 40), but Jesus Christ is Himself God's tabernacle among us and within us (John 1:14).

Under the Old Testament law, the transcendent God could not be pictured in physical form, and anyone who tried was guilty of idolatry. But Jesus Christ is "*the image of the invisible God*" (Colossians 1:15) and "*the exact representation of his being*" (Hebrews 1:3, NIV).

In the creation, at Sinai, and in the wilderness, to Adam and Abraham and all God's people, the Father longed to make Himself known and trusted and loved. His desire is fulfilled completely and forever in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with Us.

Consider this:

Why did God wait so long before sending

Jesus Christ,

the final answer for all our needs?

*Because we can't understand Him without
the law, the history, the Psalms, and the prophets.*

*They form the necessary backdrop for
all He is and all He has done.*

*Without them, we can't fully receive Him as
the fulfillment of all God's promises and purposes,
as our Sacrifice, our Great High Priest, our Redeemer, and our King.*

Christ in Genesis and Exodus

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Christ the Tabernacle

Read Exodus 25 – 30; 36 – 40; John 1:14; 6:48-58; Hebrews 8:1-5

God gave the Old Testament tabernacle so that
our senses, minds, and imaginations
might be permeated with
the glory of His presence.

Jesus Christ is that tabernacle perfected,
its intent completed.

The tabernacle was only a copy.

Jesus is the full presence of God
now living within and among us,
forever uniting heaven and earth.

He is the law of God,
all that is pleasing to the Father,
no longer engraved on stone tablets,

but written on the hearts of His people.
He is the Bread of the Presence,
 spreading an eternal feast for all who come.
He is the Light forever burning,
 illuminating the whole world.
He is the incense of God's Presence,
 the fragrance of His holiness,
 the aroma of His unfailing love.
He engulfs us in the richness,
 the texture,
 the color,
 the beauty of heaven itself.
He is the final, perfect sacrifice,
 making us right with the Father.
He is the Great High Priest,
 uniting us with the Father.

In Christ, the Transcendent God fills
 our souls and our senses,
 our daily routines and our highest dreams.
Jesus Christ enfolds
 all we are in
 all He is.

Beyond All Thought

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

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 **Tamar**...*

*...Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was **Rahab**,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was **Ruth**,*

Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been **Uriah's wife**...

...and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of **Mary**,
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.).

Family Tree

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

John the Baptist

Though the story of John the Baptist appears in the New Testament,
in many ways he was the last of the Old Testament prophets.

He lived and died before the

death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. (See Matthew 11:11.)

In scripture, his introduction follows the pattern of the Old Testament prophets:

"When _____ were ruling, 'the word of God came to _____, son of _____".

(Compare Luke 3:1-2 to Jeremiah 1:1-2; Ezekiel 1:1-3; Hosea 1:1, etc.)

John had the same bold message and manner as the prophets.
And like many of them,
because he courageously spoke God's truth to powerful leaders,
he met a brutal death. (See Hebrews 11:37-38.)

The Old Testament prophets pointed to Jesus by their
bold obedience and
single-minded devotion to God.

Some also spoke specific prophecies about Him.
But John pointed to Jesus more immediately
than any of the other prophets.

John introduced the world to the living, breathing, present Christ.
He was Jesus' contemporary and blood-relative.
Jesus and John led-off with the same message:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2; 4:17)

They both lived a rugged life, and
in the end, both met a painful, humiliating death,
simply for speaking God's word to those who didn't want to hear.

But I love what John 10:40-42 says about John:

"(Jesus) went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing, and He stayed there. Many came to Him and were saying, "While John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this man was true." And many believed in Him there." (NASB)

I want my words and my life to point to Jesus the way John's did,
not by drawing attention to myself, but to Him.

I want my words and my life to say with John:

"He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30, NASB)

Hear the Prophet Sing of Jesus (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Annunciation

Read Luke 1:26-38

Through His angel, Gabriel, God came to a Jewish teenage girl, just as He had come to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and more. He came making lavish demands and lavish promises. God offered her the privilege of taking part in His timeless plan of salvation.

This girl would become the mother of His Son, so God gave her the clearest picture to date of Who the Child would be:

1. For the first time, we hear His name: Jesus. It's the Greek form of the Hebrew name, "Joshua," which means, "The Lord saves." Matthew 1:21 adds that He would be given that name "because he will save his people from their sins".
2. He would be given the throne of His father David, and He would reign forever. In other words, He would be the Messiah promised by God's prophets for so many centuries, the Deliverer that every faithful Jew eagerly anticipated.
3. He would be the Son of the Most High, of God Himself, but in a fuller way than David or any other king had been. The Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, would Himself conceive the child. Every other human child receives God's life passed along through uncounted human fathers and human generations. This child would receive God's life directly from Almighty God Himself, with no human male in-between. Any of the Old Testament prophets would have been stunned to receive such a message. Only the Child's mother was told, the girl who would be involved in this marvelous, amazing transaction.

For hundreds of years God had been making promises to His people. He had promised

a Prince,
a Shepherd,
a Healer,
a Conqueror,
a Prophet,
a Priest,
a Lion and a Lamb.

He had promised Peace. He had promised Freedom. He had promised Love and Life without end.

Finally, all the promises were about to be delivered, wrapped together as one magnificent Promise. The Promise was a Baby. The Promise was Immanuel. The Promise was God Himself.

Christmas reminds us of two truths we must never forget:

1. *God is faithful to His promises, generation after generation.*
2. *God brings divine beauty and purity out of our humanity.*

The Promise
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Birth of Christ

Christmas Is a Story of Joy

*Mary said,
"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46-47, NIV)*

Christmas is a story of Joy.
It's a story of wonder,
 of magnificent promises made and kept.
It's a story of faith,
 of love and light and worship,
A story of long journeys and incredible discoveries.

It's a story of kings and angels,
 of shepherds and priests,
 of young and old.
It's a story of beautiful, ordinary people.

But above all, Christmas is a story of Jesus.
When we sing at Christmas,
 we sing about *Him*.
When we celebrate,
 we celebrate *Him*.
When we are happy,
 we are happy because *He* is with us.

Christmas is a story of Joy,
And our Joy is
 Jesus.

Hear the Prophets Talking

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Praise to You, Our Father!

Read Luke 1:46-55

Father, as I read Mary's Magnificat,
I hear the joy and praise in her voice.
She realized that the coming of Christ proved that
You are faithful to all Your promises.
Your coming to us in Christ shows that You
are all You say You are and
do all You say You will do.
Praise to You, Father!

Christ's coming displays
Your deep compassion on
all our human weakness and need.

In Christ
You pour out Your grace on the unworthy and
lavish Your mercy on us,
though we don't deserve it.

In the infant Jesus,
Your tenderness becomes flesh and blood.
We can touch You, and
You touch us.

O Holy God,
in Christ we see Your power to
make us like Yourself.

In Christ
we sense Your desire for
intimate fellowship with us human creatures.

Father, in Jesus Christ
we see You as You are!
Praise to You!
Praise and glory and thanks to You
forever and ever!

My Soul Exalts You, Lord (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Messiah and the Holy Spirit

Seven hundred years before Jesus' birth,
the prophet Isaiah foretold that
Messiah would be a man of the Spirit.

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*
(Isaiah 11:2, NIV)

*“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him.”*
(Isaiah 42:1, NIV)

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.”*
(Isaiah 61:1, NIV)

Not only would Messiah be fully equipped with the Spirit, but
He would pour out that Spirit on all God's people.
Hear the testimony of John the Baptist at Jesus' baptism:

*“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would
not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told
me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will
baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”*
(John 1:32-34, NIV)

Throughout the events of Jesus' birth,
before Jesus even appears,
the Spirit is already doing His work.
First, hear Luke 1:13-15 (NIV):

*The angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John...He will be filled with the **Holy Spirit** even from birth.”*

Hear also Luke 1:30-35 (NIV):

*The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus...” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The **Holy Spirit** will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”*

Listen to what happens when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth:

*When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the **Holy Spirit**. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.”
(Luke 1:41-42, NIV)*

The Spirit spoke through Zechariah at the circumcision of John the Baptist:

*[John’s] father Zechariah was filled with the **Holy Spirit** and prophesied: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.”
(Luke 1:67-68, NIV)*

When Mary and Joseph took the infant Jesus to the temple, the Spirit testified to Him through Simeon:

*There was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the **Holy Spirit** was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the **Holy Spirit** that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Moved by the **Spirit**, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation.”
(Luke 2:25-30, NIV)*

Later, when Jesus’ earthly ministry was drawing to a close, He would tell His disciples:

“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)

We see the Spirit already filling that role during Jesus’ birth. He testifies to Jesus through Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, and even through John the Baptist when he is still in his mother’s womb.

In both Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, the word translated as “spirit” also means “wind” and “breath”. The Spirit is the Wind of God, the Breath of God. He is God’s life and power in motion. As such, He is the one who plants God’s divine life in the womb of the virgin Mary.

Jesus Christ came in the power of the Spirit,
lived in the power of the Spirit, and
rose in the power of the Spirit.
When He returned to His Father,
He poured out that same Spirit on all believers.
This Spirit is Messiah’s gift to all who trust Him.
The Spirit of Christ is your eternal birthright as a child of God.
Live in Him.
Speak in Him.
Minister in Him.
Love in Him.

*Father,
today,
in every situation,
I want the Spirit of Jesus to shape the way
I think, speak, and react.*

God in Christ in Us

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Make God Flesh and Blood

What an amazing concept!
Our loving God,
 an infinite Spirit being,
 holy,
 unseen, and
 transcendent,
made Himself a real human being.
He longed for us to know Him.
He wanted us to trust Him.
He wanted to assure us that
 He understood us.
He became like us in every way, sharing
 our existence,
 our life,
 our temptation,
 our pain,
 even our death.
He became like us so that we could become like Him.

That is incarnation:
 God made flesh,
 God become human.
God became incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is no longer with us in physical form.
But God's deep longing to be incarnate
 has not cooled.
He still burns to be
 seeable and
 touchable.
He still desires to be
 flesh and blood here on this earth,
 among the human beings who need to
 know Him and
 come to Him.
Incarnation is still what He wants.

How can He be incarnate here?
We, His children, His Church,
 are His incarnation.
As soon as Jesus returned to the Father,
 He poured out His own Spirit on all who trusted Him.
By the Spirit of God, we make God
 flesh and blood,

here and now.
We make Him real to needy people.
We are His face,
 His hands,
 His feet,
 His heart.
We are His love,
 His compassion,
 His holiness,
 His peace, and
 His unconquerable joy.

Our wonderful God become
 seeable and
 touchable—
what an amazing possibility!
And each of us and all of us can play a part.

Be the Incarnation

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Christ of Christmas

During Christmas, Jesus is the Gift of the Father.
He is all the fullness of God embodied in a human infant.

*A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us...
And His name will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Eternal Father,
Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6, NASB)*

Christmas is the unveiling of
God's greatest promise,
His greatest miracle,
His greatest gift:
 His own incarnation.
All He is,

all His purity and perfection,
all His transcendent beauty,
 became a human being.
The limitless God became the poorest,
most helpless of all human creatures:
 the newborn infant of an
 unmarried peasant girl.

Look! Here is the gift of Christmas.
Here is the wonder of Christmas.
Here are all the most precious treasures,
 poured out on all who will receive them.
Here are holiness,
 wisdom, and
 boundless joy,
 wholeness,
 harmony, and
 complete well-being.
Here are unity and
 individuality,
eternal belonging and
 a glorious destiny.

During Christmas, receive
 the Gift of the Father,
 the life of the Father, and
 the love of the Father.
Receive Jesus Christ by simple faith.

I Have the Truth (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is a Story of Faith *Read Luke 2:1-5*

Christmas is a story of faith.
It's a story of
 hardship and sacrifice,
 of long journeys and years of waiting.

Mary, perhaps 14 years old,
endured the terrible shame of
 being pregnant before she was married.
After traveling 80 miles to Bethlehem,
 no doubt exhausted and frightened,
 far from family and home,
she had her first child
 in the dirt and darkness
 of a stable.

Joseph stayed by her side,
 though the child was not his own.
He willingly shared her shame
 and her suffering.

Mary, Joseph, and many others
followed God through long, difficult days.
But because they were faithful,
they saw Him
 and rejoiced in Him
 and became part of His timeless story.

Christmas is a story of faith,
and we too are called to be faithful.
We too can be part of the timeless story of
 Jesus.

*Our lives play an important part in
a purpose that is much greater than we can imagine.
We will influence precious people, both present and future.
Father, help us to stay faithful in the place You have put us.*

Walking by Faith (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is the Story of a Baby

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

The Light Is Born

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Incarnation Wonder

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (John 1:18, NIV)

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!

Incarnation Wonder

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Reflection on Psalm 97

Look to creation.
See fire and smoke,
 light and darkness,
 heaven and earth
proclaim Him:
 One God!
 Almighty God!
 Glorious God!

Look to Jesus Christ, the
 God
 man.
See His life,
 death, and
 life from death
proclaim Him:
 One God!
 Almighty God!
 Glorious God!

At His coming,
 all the angels,
 all His people, and
 all creation
sing for joy:
 He has come!
 He is here!
 GOD IS WITH US!

Join the celebration!

Psalm 97

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

You Became Human

God in Christ,
 You became fully human.
You became as human as You intended us to be,
 minus Satan's intrusion.

You were not only human,
but You made Yourself the most helpless of all humanity:
 a newborn infant,
 conceived in a poverty-stricken, unmarried peasant girl.
You lacked even a room or a bed of Your own.
You were utterly
 weak,
 helpless, and
 dependent in every way.
And looming in Your future was
 death,
 just like all the rest of us.

You emptied Yourself,
 yet You were still God
You were still
 our Creator,
 our Sustainer,
 our Life,
 our Lord.
But You now made Yourself
 our Brother.
You took upon Yourself
 all that we are.
You made Yourself
 like us.

By doing so, You shared with us
 Your relationship with the Father.
YOUR Father is now
 OUR Father.

You are our Brother,
 so we are His children.
In You all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form, and
 in You, we are now complete (Colossians 2:9-10).
Just as You are like Him in every way,
 we are becoming like Him.
You are growing us to fully share
 His purpose,
 His complete self-giving,
 His love,
 His holiness,
 His joy,
 His deep well-being, and
 His eternal glory.

All this is ours because
 You became human.
You emptied Yourself
 so that we might be
 forever full in You.

You Became Human

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Share in Christ

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?*

Partners in the Mystery

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Still He Comes

We were rebels against God,
determined to be our own lords,
willfully ignorant of Him.
It seems logical that He would come to us
with a show of power,
to warn us into submission.

Instead, He came gently.
He came in love,
sharing our darkness and distress.
He came, not to force us to submit,
but to lovingly invite us to Himself.

In that very same way He still comes to each of us personally.
He comes gently.
He comes in love.
He comes inviting us to know Him and trust Him.

Still He Comes

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Our King

David had been the most powerful,
most commanding,
most “successful” king Israel had ever had.
And the Messiah was promised to be
a greater heir to
David’s glorious throne.

But Jesus arrived as the seemingly-illegitimate son of peasants,
with a filthy stable for a nursery and
a feeding trough His only cradle.
He entered this world sharing
the misery,
the poverty,
the shame, and

the oppression of His people.

Maybe that's how a king *should* come.

His riches would be the Spirit of Almighty God.
His power would be the unrestrainable love of our Father Creator.
His most sweeping victory would be His death, and
His greatest gift to His people would be
Himself.

He has come!
Receive Him now,
the King of all Kings and
the Lord of all Lords!

Infinite Lord

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

What a Beginning!

Almighty,
Holy,
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
 astonishing self-revelation.
And O what a beginning it was!

The Birthday Party

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Free, Fearless, and Complete

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
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.
(Philippians 2:5-8, NIV)*

We humans spend much of our time and energy trying to look as good as possible in the eyes of other people. Our appearance, the way we carry ourselves, the things we say, and the way we say them are often calculated to maximize our respect in the eyes of others...and perhaps to maximize our respect for ourselves.

When God came as a human being, He didn't puff Himself up. He humbled Himself. He intentionally made Himself far less than He was.

We humans are not so confident. We resist giving ourselves and our resources too completely. Our love is limited by fear. We fear vulnerability. We fear giving away too much and leaving ourselves with too little.

Almighty God has no such fear. He has no need. All that is flows from Him. He is complete and all-encompassing, all-sufficient in Himself. He is full and overflows with love. Giving is His nature, His delight.

When God came, He gave Himself without holding anything back. He willingly took upon Himself our lowliness, our weakness, and our poverty so that we could share His completeness. He made Himself like us in order that we might be like Him.

Because He came, we too can be thoroughly human, yet free, fearless, and complete by trusting our almighty, all-giving God. We can live and love as fully as He does.
Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15, NIV)

*Father,
Your Son gave up everything to
come to us:
His comfort,
His status,
His glory, and
His life.
Help me to give what little I have to
that same cause:
the salvation of our race.*

Startled by Your Lowliness (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Humble in Christ

When you look at the human Jesus and
follow His life,
what are you seeing?
You are seeing the exact likeness of the
transcendent,
invisible,

unbounded
Spirit God (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3).

And what is the most surprising, even shocking
aspect of God seen in Jesus?

His humility.

Yes, our High-and-Holy God is
the ultimate example of humility.

The Almighty humbles Himself
to tend to human need.

We are lowly creatures,
and our needs are so lowly, so gritty.

But God lovingly devotes His magnificent self to
ministering to us and to our needs.

Trace the daily life of Jesus, and
see that it is so.

So as God's children,
as siblings and servants of Jesus Christ,
what is our purpose?

What is the divine glory we are
called to display?

We shine with God's glory when
we serve human need.

Be eager, be joyful
to spend and be spent in His service.

Feel honored to show people the glorious,
down-to-earth,
self-giving love of God.

Humble in Christ

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Christmas Is a Story of Light

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
(Luke 2:8-9; Isaiah 9:2; 60:1; NIV)

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.

Jesus, the Light of the World

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Mysterious Wonders

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:8-12, NIV)

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.

The Shepherd's Carol

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

A Multitude of Angels

In both the Old and New Testaments, the words translated “angel” literally mean “messenger”. Many times God sent individual angels to deliver His message to selected persons on earth: to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-12), Abraham (Genesis 22:11-18), Moses (Exodus 3:2), Gideon (Judges 6:11-12), Zechariah (Luke 1:11-20), Mary (Luke 1:26-38), and many more.

On the other hand, visions of heaven speak of multitudes of angels. These multitudes appear in the visions of the prophets Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-4) and in John's visions recorded in Revelation (5:8-14; 7:11-12). These angels are shown serving God through obedience and praise.

But I know of only once when God sent a message to earth, not through an individual angel alone, but through a multitude of angels. This multitude was sent to announce an event that would be the turning point of all history. At that moment they would bring the praise and glory of heaven down to earth.

It was night. The place was the sky over an open field outside a small village on the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Only a handful of shepherds saw and heard this one-time appearance:

*Suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”*
(Luke 2:13-14, NASB)

The event they announced had been whispered since the beginning of human history. This event was a Gift, prophesied for centuries by God's seers. They had spoken in

common images of a Child, a Shepherd, a Servant, a Warrior, and a King who would somehow be beyond all titles, all descriptions, and all imaginings. This Gift was a coming, a personal arrival, and on that ordinary, extraordinary night, the arrival was now:

Transcendent God had taken flesh and blood.
Holy God was, now and forever, wholly human.

Heaven itself had come to earth. The One who had sat on the throne was now an infant lying in a feeding trough. But for just a few moments that night, He brought His throne-room choir with Him.

Rejoice in His Coming

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is a Story of Love

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel,
praising God and saying,
"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."
(Luke 2:13-14, NIV)*

*Love comes from God...
God is love...
For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish
but have eternal life.
(1 John 4:7, 8; John 3:16, NIV)*

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.

*Father,
Your love is the force that powers the universe.
May it power my life as well.*

Love Has Come!

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

More Loving

This Christmas, Father, help me to be more loving.
Reshape me by the Spirit of Christ.
Make me more like You.

Add or subtract from me.
Edit and revise me as You see fit.
Tune me up, Lord.

Challenge me,
teach me,
inspire me by Your example.

I am listening, Father.
Lead, and I will follow.

Open my eyes to the needs all around me.
Help me to see You standing among us,
eager to supply each need from Your great abundance.

This Christmas,
make me as humble as the newborn Christ.
Keep me as patient as You, my Father,
and as faithful as Your unfailing promises.
Help me to share the good news about Jesus
as naturally and eagerly as the shepherds.
With the magi, may I bow in worship and
offer You only my very best.

Bring your love to life,
O kind, compassionate Father.
Make it flesh and blood in me.

Christmas Love

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Everyone Is Invited!

Read Luke 2:15-20

*The following reflection is based on a sermon by John Chrysostom,
reportedly from the first Christmas sermon ever preached, 386 A.D.*

Jesus Christ has come!
God is now on earth!
Humanity now rules in heaven!

The hope of all nations is here!
Come, everyone!

Gather and celebrate!

Kings have come that they might
 bow to the King of Kings.
Soldiers have come that they might
 serve the Lord of all the armies of heaven.
Women have come that they might
 adore Him Who was born of a woman.
Children gather round to
 see the God who has become a child.
Shepherds leave their flocks to
 come and know the Good Shepherd.
Priests come to
 worship our Great High Priest.
Wise men have journeyed from the ends of the earth
 to wonder at the source of all wisdom.
Servants kneel to the Lord of Lords who
 made Himself a servant like them.
Sinners draw near to the holy God who
 gladly calls Himself their Friend.

*Jesus Christ is the Father's good news
 for every human being.
In Christ, God stands in the public square and shouts,
 "I love you!
 I forgive you!
 Just trust Me, and
 you will live deeply,
 freely, and
 forever!"*

Christ the Lord Is with Us!

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

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
our entire race—
not 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!

The Lord Has Come!

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Simeon

Luke 2:21-35

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!

Simeon

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

A Voice in the Wilderness

Read Luke 3:1-6

While most people,
 even God's people,
were preoccupied with the world's celebrities,
God's living, sovereign, creative word
 was coming to a man alone in the desert.
He had none of the world's
 soft clothing,
 soft ways, or
 soft words.
Everything about him was
 raw and
 real.

He was a voice crying in the wilderness,
 in the world's wildest, most untamed place.
God had met His people there before.
He had led them through this desert for forty years,
 teaching them,
 confronting them,
 purifying them,
 drawing them to Himself.
He had isolated them from
 every other comfort and
 every other source of supply,
to show them that He alone was
 their bread,

their security,
their truth,
their God.

Now, through this Baptizer, He was calling them again.
He was calling them back out to the wilderness,
back out to die to their sins and rise to
new life,
untamed life,
pure and all-sufficient life in Himself alone.

Go to the Wilderness!

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Look!

Read John 1:29-34

Hear the voice of John the Baptist,
calling to you from the wilderness,
pointing you to the Coming One, Jesus Christ:

“Look!
Here comes the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

“Look!
The Son of God steps out of eternity
to let you know your Father face to face.

“Look!
Jesus comes to immerse our hearts and lives,
not just in water,
but in the Spirit of God Himself.”

As Jesus comes to *you*
offering such rich gifts,
how will you receive Him?

A DEEPER CHRISTMAS, p.93

Christ Is Coming! Lift Your Eyes!
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Epiphany: The Light of the World

The Light of the World

Read Luke 2:22-32

Jesus is not just the central figure of Christianity.
He is the central figure of all history,
of earth and heaven.
He is the Creator, the Sustainer of all that is,
seen and unseen,
the Sovereign Word of the Sovereign God.
He is not just the wisest person who ever lived.
In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
He is not just the leader of one group,
culture, or
movement.
He is the King of all Kings and
the Lord of all Lords.

Isaiah said:

*“See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.”* (Isaiah 60:2, NIV)

Jesus is the Light of the World, and
as He is lifted up,
all nations, all peoples will come to Him.

*We know what the holy and wise of all ages
have longed to discover.
We see Jesus Christ.
How very blessed we are!*

Light of Every Nation
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Christ of Epiphany

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9:2, NIV)

During Epiphany, Jesus is the Light of the Father,
drawing all people to Himself.

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness will cover the earth
And deep darkness the peoples;
But the Lord will rise upon you
And His glory will appear upon you.
Nations will come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3, NASB)*

Among the very first people to be told of Messiah's coming,
among His very first worshipers,
were visitors from a far away land and a different religion.
Jesus did not come as just
the Jewish Messiah or
the Christian Savior,
but as the Light of the World.

*I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6, NASB)*

Jesus is the knowledge of our universal God shining out to
every people and culture, to
every individual, for
every human need.

He is understanding in our profound ignorance.
He is wisdom in our foolishness.
He is God's glory in our darkness and shame.
He is pure,
beautiful,
living truth.

During Epiphany, Jesus is the Light of the Father.
Come to the Light.
Walk in the Light.
Lift the light so that
all can see Him for all He is.

God Is Light

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is the Story of a King

Read Matthew 2:1-6

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.

Now unto Us a Child Is Born

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Star

God made the stars to bring light to the darkness.
To us, their physical light may seem small.
But the enlightenment they bring is beyond expressing.
These distant, burning suns
 eloquently,
 constantly
remind us of a God who is
 limitless,
 loving,
 changeless, and
 magnificent,
beyond our imagination.

So when His Son came to earth, our Creator God prepared a
 special star for this
 special revelation of Himself.
That star silently announced
that our Magnificent God was now
 living among us, and
 we could know Him
 face-to-face.
The star began to gather all nations to worship
 their King of Kings and
 Lord of Lords.

Now this Christ is Himself our
 Bright Morning Star.
He Himself is God's special revelation of His
 faithfulness and
 love.
He is the star that rises in the east
 just before sunrise,
 when the night seems blackest,
announcing that
 our long wait is almost over, and

a new, eternal day is about to dawn.

Praise to You,
Bright Morning Star!
O come to us,
Lord Jesus!

Star Hymn (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is the Story of a Star

Read Matthew 2:7-10

Christmas is the story of a Star.
The wise men had studied the stars for years, but suddenly,
One Star
caused them to leave home
 on a long journey,
 traveling many difficult months.
That One Star
was a sign from heaven,
and they followed.

One Star
was their only guide
all the way from a distant country
 through so much desert
 and so many midnights.
One Star
led them to
 a simple house
 in the tiny village of
 far-away Bethlehem.

One Star.

Christmas is the story of a Star.
The story reminds us that
God never leaves us alone.

Even in the blackest night,
He always sends
One Star.
And our Star is
Jesus.

*Father,
through all this darkness,
Jesus is the Light leading us to You.
I will walk in Him step by step.*

The March of the Three Wise Men (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is a Story of Worship

On coming to the house, [the Magi] saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. (Matthew 2:11, NIV)

Christmas is a story of worship.
The scriptures say that
 the heavens sing of God's glory,
 and the earth tells of
 the wonderful things He does.
Jesus said that if God's people are silent,
 the rocks themselves will cry out and
 praise Him.

When the shepherds heard that
 the Promised One had come,
they journeyed to Bethlehem and
 worshiped the Child.

When the wise men knew that
He was born,
 distance could not keep them away.
They came and brought Him
precious gifts—

gifts fit for a king.
They bowed low and
worshiped Him.

How can we do any less?
With all the elaborate celebrating
this time of year,
how much do we truly worship Him?

Christmas is a story of worship.
And this season,
in the privacy of our hearts,
with the wise men,
with the shepherds, and
with all creation,
let us bow and worship Him.
Let us worship
Jesus.

All the Angels Worship You (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is the Story of a Gift

On coming to the house, [the Magi] saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. (Matthew 2:11, NIV)

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
love 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 His indescribable gift!
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.*

Jesus, the Gift of Christmas (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Consider This Gift

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:15, NIV)

This Gift is a treasure,
but more than a treasure.
This Gift is a man,
but more than a man.
He is a shepherd,
but more than a shepherd.
He is a mighty warrior come to deliver His people,
a healer come to take away all our diseases,
a priest come to bring His people to God.
But He is infinitely more than
any and all of these.

He is the heir of all worlds,
the Lord of all Lords.
He is the Second Adam,
the first of an entirely new human race.
He is the God-Man,
uniting earth and heaven.
He is the perfect sacrifice,
purchasing eternal life for all who trust Him.
He is the fullness of God, and
God's fullness in us.
He is God's own Son,
come from God's own heart.
He is the love of God,
lavishly,
freely,
tenderly given
to each and every one of us.
He is Jesus Christ.

Jesus
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Seeing God

Father, You are an infinite Spirit being,
overflowing this vast universe,
holy, all-powerful, and complete in Yourself,
pure, unreflected Light.
I am a grain of sand,
a passing breath,
selfish, helpless, and engulfed in my own darkness.
I could never have known You,
but You shined the Light of Jesus Christ
into my world and
into my life.

Thank You, thank You, thank You,
my Father!
Praise,
worship, and
love
be to You forever and ever!
Glory in the highest!

You Are the Light (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

When the Heavens Open

When God opens the heavens,
He shows us what He is doing.
He shows us our world as He sees it.

When Jesus was born, God opened the heavens.
He sent us a special star to announce that
the magnificent, transcendent God was
now living among us.
The star drew worshipers from
a far-away land and
a different religion.
They were the first sign that the One who had come was

the Light of all the nations and
the King of all Kings.

When Jesus was baptized, God opened the heavens.
As Jesus' ministry began, His first act was to publicly
take all our sins upon Himself.

The Sinless One lined up with the sinners and
symbolically died beneath Jordan's waters,
bearing the sins of the whole world.

At this crucial moment the Father spoke and
the Spirit appeared.

Together they testified that
this was indeed the pure and perfect Son of God.

When Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration,
God opened the heavens.

As Jesus approached His death,
the Father gave three disciples a fleeting glimpse of
the Christ as He truly was,
in His eternal splendor,
human yet heavenly.

The law and the prophets visibly testified to Him.

On all three occasions, God opened the heavens to show us
unmistakably,
unforgettably

that His own Son had come to us,
the Light of the World.

He had taken on our flesh and blood
to bear away all our sin.

He had come so that every one of us might
share fully and forever in Him.

Epiphany Hymn

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

A Life Framed with Love

Read Matthew 2:12-18

Jesus was born as He would die.
He would die as He was born.

The birth and death of the Light of the World
were shrouded in darkness.

His trusted companions were the lowly and powerless.

Jealous leaders pursued Him with murderous hearts
while humble women gently cared for His needs.

His helpless body was wrapped in cloth and laid in borrowed quarters.

Coming and going from this world,
He was immersed in suffering, shame, and desperate circumstances.

Jesus is a portrait of God our Father,
framed with tenderness, mercy, and sacrificial love.

*Father, I look at the life of your Son, and
I see the full extent of Your love
etched on every page.
Throughout His birth, His life, and His death,
He drank our shame and suffering
full strength.
Father, I bow in silence.
How can I respond to You?
How can I live my love for You?*

One with Us

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Glimpses of Messiah's Future

Read Matthew 2

Before the Christ child was old enough to do anything on His own, He was already provoking strong reactions from those for Him and against Him. Even as an infant, He was both a cornerstone and a stumbling block, fulfilling the prophecy of Simeon:

"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed." (Luke 2:34-35, NIV)

In Matthew 2 we catch these glimpses of Messiah's future:

1. His own people, who were expecting His coming, generally met Him with ignorance, indifference, or hostility. Instead, He drew individual worshipers, often Gentiles, from far away and from unexpected sources. (Matthew 2:1-12)
2. Christ shared the sufferings of His people, Israel: He fled for His life to Egypt, lived there as a refugee, and was eventually called out by His Father. (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-21)
3. Those nearest to Jesus were frequently pursued, persecuted, and martyred. (Matthew 2:16-18)
4. He identified, not with the powerful and privileged, but with the very lowest and most despised of His people. (Matthew 2:22-23)

Get to know this unique, controversial, intriguing, and intensely personal Son of God and Son of Man.

See How God's Flower Blossoms

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Promises of His Coming Again

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 still coming and
will come again
in love,
to save completely all who will receive Him.

God Is Here among Us

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Rejoice in Your Destiny

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
(2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV)

The Christmas story is so simple that a child can enjoy it, yet so broad and deep that no human mind can grasp it all. A Being so magnificent that He spoke the universe into existence from nothing – He merely expressed His will and it appeared – this Being became entirely human and lived among us.

We could see and touch the One who transcends all matter. What we saw, what we touched was love – pure, complete, compassionate love, in a world soaked with fear and selfishness.

This Being became humble. How could the sovereign source of all be humble? The immense God became small for us. Perfect wisdom, perfect peace, perfect love became small and simple enough for us.

In this One, our mortality took on immortality. The human has become divine. Humility glows with Majesty. Weakness is now strength. Our darkness now shines with the splendor of Almighty God.

Look at Jesus Christ. He has become what we can be:
a creature one with our Creator;
a child of man and a child of God;
thoroughly human, yet holy and divine.

Look at Jesus Christ and rejoice in your destiny.

*O God, for me make
the waiting and hoping of Advent
no longer just a season,
but a constant hunger for You.*

Be Immanuel in Me

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Christmas Is Only the Beginning

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.... I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.
(Revelation 22:13, 16, NIV)*

Christmas is only the beginning.
It's the beginning of a beautiful Life –
a Life of healing and teaching,
 of feeding and forgiving,
a Life of suffering, dying, and
 rising again.
This Life shows us the best
 and happiest way to live.

This Life still goes on
and will go on forever,
 redeeming,
 blessing,
 creating,
 and surprising.

Discover this Life.
Discover the One who is
 the Beginning and the Ending,
 Life's Source and
 its Ultimate Goal,
the One who

lived in time
but fills eternity,
Who was a tiny baby,
yet the whole universe
cannot contain Him.

This Christmas,
make the greatest discovery of your life.
Now, today,
come discover
Jesus.

Discover Jesus Christ (Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Word: in Weakness and in Power

In the beginning,
into the silence of nothingness came
the Word of God.
The Sovereign of the universe expressed His will, and
it became reality.
The Word of God spoke, and
creation came to be, and
all the morning stars sang for joy.
His powerful Word continues to resound,
sustaining all that is.

Into the darkness of our sin came
the Word of God.
God spoke His loving will,
not as an almighty conqueror,
but as a helpless infant.
He didn't shout;
He whispered.
He didn't command;
He invited.
The Word of God spoke,
not in power,

but in weakness.

And when His Word speaks to us,
 He still speaks in weakness, not in power.
He doesn't demand in harsh tones.
He speaks gently,
 inviting,
 drawing us to Himself.

But at a time He alone has chosen,
 the Word of God will again speak with absolute power.
The Sovereign of all reality will express His will,
 and all that is will respond.
Creation will again be an Eden of
 holiness and beauty,
 truth and love,
 completely one with its Maker.
To those who have listened to His inviting Word,
 this will mean sharing the fullness of His life forever.
To those who have ignored His Word, this will mean
 eternal exclusion,
 separation from Him, and
 death.

He is still speaking in a gentle whisper,
 calling,
 inviting,
 drawing.
Hear the Word.
Receive the Word.

Hear the Word
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Reflection on Psalm 98

From the very beginning,
 God has longed to be
 with His people.
From the garden to the
 wilderness, from the
 tabernacle to the
 temple,
God has burned with the desire to
 live among His people and
 be their God in the fullest possible sense.

He planned it,
He promised it, and
 in His absolute sovereignty,
 He determined that it would be so.

He came once –
 to become one of us and
 to give His own life to rescue us.
And He left only
 to pour out His Spirit on us and
 to prepare for our full, eternal union with Him.

The same sovereign love that caused Him to come once
 is bringing Him back.
He has promised, and
 He yearns for us with the heart of a Father.
Nothing can keep Him away.
 Nothing.

All His people,
all the nations,
all creation,
 rejoice!
 Stay ready!
 Wait expectantly!
HE IS COMING!

Psalm 98
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Stay Ready

Matthew 25:1-13

In Matthew 24, in Jesus' final days with His disciples,
He warns them that difficult days lie ahead for them.
In the process, He sketches the end times,
then drives home this one central message:

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you must be ready as well; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will." (Matthew 24:42-44, NASB)

The most important matter in all time and eternity is to
be ready when Christ returns.
But no one can possibly know when He will return.
So how can we be certain to be ready?

Matthew 25:1-13, the parable of the ten virgins, answers that question:
The only sure way to BE ready is to STAY ready.

Five young women were wise.
They made sure they were ready for the coming of the Bridegroom
by bringing extra oil for their lamps.
Even though the Bridegroom was delayed,
they were prepared.

Five young women were foolish.
They were unprepared, and as a result,
they were left in the darkness,
forever outside.
They missed their entire purpose for being there.
How sad!

But our situation is infinitely more serious.
STAY READY for Jesus Christ!

Ready
(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

The Second Coming

“Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:4, NASB)

The New Testament teaches that the same Christ who came in weakness as an infant will return in power and great glory. His first coming was secretive. But the second time, “every eye will see Him” (Revelation 1:7, NASB).

But nearly two thousand years have passed, and still, no Second Coming. And since our Savior Himself said that no one can know when it will occur, it could be another ten thousand years before the prophecy is finally fulfilled.

So why do we continue to teach, write, sing, and make movies about it? To many, the idea of Christ coming in the clouds, in full view of every living human being, seems hard to believe and remote from practical daily life. Why should we risk embarrassing ourselves and alienating our listeners by emphasizing such an incredible idea, one that even believers admit might not happen for generations, centuries, or even millennia?

Consider this:

1. Jesus taught His return as centrally important. He spoke about it clearly, emphatically, and at length. Realize that He knew life both in heaven and on earth. He had seen both time and eternity. If He considered His return important, it is important!
2. The New Testament writers unanimously teach it. The Spirit of Christ spoke about His return through each and every one of them. They considered it essential to believe that Christ will come to finish all that He has started and to consummate our salvation. For all the New Testament writers, the truth of Christ’s return fueled faith, hope, perseverance, and holy living.
3. The stakes are high. When Christ returns, He will judge every individual. Depending on our relationship with Him, we will go to eternal life or eternal death, to joyful union with Him or complete and final separation from Him (Matthew 25:31-46).
4. When He comes, we must be ready. Since no one can know when He will return (Matthew 24:36), His return will seem sudden and unexpected (Matthew 24:37-44). He will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The only sure way to be prepared is to stay prepared (Luke 12:35-48).
5. Christ’s first coming had been foretold for centuries, and He did come, at God’s right time. His second coming, long foretold, is just as certain. It will occur when the time is right. The reality of Christmas proclaims the reality of His return.

6. Peter reminds us that with our eternal God, “*one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day*” (2 Peter 3:8, NASB; see also Psalm 90:4). His sense of time is far different than ours. But be assured that He is not lax about His promises but “*is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:8-9). God’s “delays” are His patient love.

Consider the beautiful things Christ has done in you already, and eagerly anticipate His completing each one. Look forward to that wonderful day. Wait patiently for it, knowing that it will happen in the fullness of time. Keep first things first. Stay focused on Him. Stay faithful.

Second Coming Hymn

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

We Wait

Romans 8 tells us:

The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved.

But hope that is seen is no hope at all.

Who hopes for what he already has?

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (vv.22-25, NIV)

So Father, we wait.

Basking in the joy and freedom of all You’ve given us in Jesus Christ,
we eagerly await His return and
the completion of all Your love has planned.

We wait.

Immersed in disappointments and delays,
weakness and uncertainty,
decay and death,

we keep our faith focused on You.

Though we cannot see,

we cling to the strong and certain hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.
Day by day, in the noise and in the silence, our hearts forever cry,
“Father, may *Your* Kingdom come and
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven!”

We wait.
So many are deluded,
 lost in the darkness of the small and temporary.
In You we glimpse bigger realities.
Our physical world seems so lasting and all-encompassing,
but it will burn away like a morning mist.
Father, don't let it seduce us.
You are truth.
You are unchanging.
You are forever.

In this false world, keep us faithful in proclaiming the ultimate things:
 the return of Jesus,
 the judgment, and
 the world to come.

Whether He returns today or in ten thousand years is not the point.
The truth of His return shapes the entire reality in which we live.

Our Father, we look forward to the day when all creation rings with
 the music and the beautiful silence of all You are.

As we believers wait together,
 enduring these last hours of pain, darkness, grief, and death,
we will encourage one another to the hope and joy that are ours in You.
We'll share songs, stories, and acts of kindness that remind us of
 Your eternal, unfailing love.

*Father, I will remain dressed and ready,
at my post and fully engaged in the ministry
You have assigned me,
with my heart fixed on You.*

Waiting for Our Lord

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

God Keeps His Promises

During His final days on earth, Jesus told His disciples what was to come:

“All the nations of the earth... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

(Matthew 24:30-31, NIV)

Every year Advent and Christmas shout this truth:

God keeps His promises.

Though the promises are ancient, and
the wait is long, and
the fulfillment seems so improbable,
God always keeps His promises.

For centuries God had spoken through His prophets,
telling in amazing detail of a coming Messiah.

Jesus Christ came exactly as prophesied.

The same God promises that
this same Jesus will come again.

He urges us to be watchful,
to be faithful,
for the Day will come when least expected.

Lord, we are watching.

We are waiting.

We are obeying.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Consider this:

*The great drama of salvation,
with all its faithfulness and betrayal,
its patient endurance and apostasy,
its self-centeredness and self-sacrifice,
is going on right now.
Each of us is taking part day by day.*

*Father, when Jesus returns,
may I be faithfully at my post,
trusting,
serving, and
eagerly expecting Him.*

The Trumpet Will Sound

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

Reflection on Habakkuk 2:5-14

The earth will be filled

With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,

As the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14, NASB)

Scriptural context: God will cleanse away all the evil of this world.

They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord

As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9, NASB)

Scriptural context: Messiah will come, filled with God's Spirit, and will bring justice and peace to all creation.

Lies and violence,
lust and greed
flood the earth.

They are plagues running
rampant,
unchecked,
driven by
selfishness and fear.

But the Holy Son of
Almighty God,
who is

all power and
all love,
the Great Healer,
the Victor over
sin and
death,
will return to earth
at the perfect time,
to finish all that He started.

Then justice,

the rightness of holy love, and
peace,
the absence of all conflict and
the deep well-being of God Himself,
will flood this world.
All creation will be blanketed with a
rich and
unbounded
knowing of God.
*Now we see in a mirror dimly,
but then face to face;
now I know in part,
but then I will know fully,
just as I also have been fully known.*
(1 Corinthians 13:12, NASB)

And that complete knowing,
warm,
intimate, and
all-encompassing,
will be life itself,
eternal life in all its
joy and fullness.
*This is eternal life,
that they may know
You, the only true God, and
Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
(John 17:3, NASB)

Come, Lord Jesus!

Full Knowing

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Come, Our Lord!

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)

[Recording](#)

Reflection on Psalm 72

Father, Your Messiah reigns!
He is filled with all
 Your justice,
 Your holiness,
 Your goodness, and
 Your truth,
and we are complete in Him.

All creation is complete in Him,
 re-imagined,
 re-made,
 reborn.

Nothing remains that is not from
 Him,
 the holy Christ,
 Your Son.

Death is gone,
 forever removed from our glorious home.

Life,
beauty, and
fruitfulness are exploding
 all around us,
 at every level.

Creation itself is singing His name!

His reign is complete, filling all
 time and
 space.

His character,
His life,
His being
 now reshape all reality.

Need,
narrowness, and
sorrow
 are forever past.

Only abundance,
 peace, and
 joy are ahead.

Blessed be You, Eternal Father, and
blessed be Your Son,
Jesus Christ,
 our Savior,

our Brother,
our King!

Psalm 72

(Hymn)

[Printed Music](#)
[Recording](#)

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