



CHRISTMAS LIGHT

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& PASTOR RYAN STORY**

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First Edition, December 2021

**Published by:
The River Church
8393 E. Holly Rd.
Holly, MI 48442**

**Scriptures are taken from the Bible,
English Standard Version (ESV)**



THE RIVER CHURCH

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

09 LESSON ONE • JESUS IS THE LIGHT

- 15** Devotion 1: *"Away in a Manger"*
- 17** Devotion 2: *"Do You Hear What I Hear?"*
- 19** Devotion 3: *"Go Tell It On The Mountain"*
- 21** Devotion 4: *"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"*
- 23** Devotion 5: *"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"*
- 25** Devotion 6: *"I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day"*

29 LESSON TWO • NOTICING THE LIGHT

- 35** Devotion 7: *"I Wonder As I Wander"*
- 37** Devotion 8: *"It Came Upon A Midnight Clear"*
- 39** Devotion 9: *"Joy To The World"*
- 41** Devotion 10: *"Love Came Down At Christmas"*
- 43** Devotion 11: *"Mary, Did You Know?"*
- 47** Devotion 12: *"Mary's Boy Child"*

51 LESSON THREE • RECEIVING THE LIGHT

- 57** Devotion 13: *"O Come All Ye Faithful"*
- 59** Devotion 14: *"O Come Let Us Adore Him"*
- 61** Devotion 15: *"O Come, O Come Emmanuel"*
- 63** Devotion 16: *"O Holy Night"*
- 67** Devotion 17: *"O Little Town Of Bethlehem"*
- 69** Devotion 18: *"Silent Night"*

73 LESSON FOUR • SHARING THE LIGHT

- 77** Devotion 19: *"Sweet Little Jesus Boy"*
- 79** Devotion 20: *"The First Noel"*
- 81** Devotion 21: *"The Little Drummer Boy"*
- 83** Devotion 22: *"We Three Kings"*
- 85** Devotion 23: *"What Child Is This?"*
- 87** Devotion 24: *"With Us"*

PREFACE

Driving through some neighborhoods between Thanksgiving and Christmas can be very exciting for children and adults alike. Some houses light up the whole sky. Lights are trimming the house, encircling several trees, and encasing each window. The scene can be breathtaking.

Some people get so caught up with the events of Christmas that they miss the true Light of Christmas – Jesus.

Christmas Light takes a fresh look at Christmas through the narrative of John chapter 1. Four main topics are viewed.

- Jesus is the Light
- Noticing the Light
- Receiving the Light
- Sharing the Light

Along with seeing Jesus as the true Light of Christmas, *Christmas Light* takes a look at the most common Christmas Carols examining their author, history, and teachings.

Christmas Light consists of four study guides for personal or group discussion and twenty-four devotions to help you see the Light of Christmas.

LESSON ONE

JESUS IS THE LIGHT

PASTOR RYAN STORY



CHRISTMAS LIGHT

“Dad! There are lights everywhere! I love lights,” roared my son Ezekiel the moment he saw the city of Grand Blanc putting up their Christmas decorations. Zeke is a bit of an extreme person, roared may not completely be the loudest word I can think of. For some reason, I believe children get superpowers when they are strapped in their car seats, and Zeke might have become Banshee for a moment (shout out to all my X-Men fans if you got that reference).

1. What is your first indication that the Christmas season is upon you?

All this month we are going to be studying various kinds of “Christmas Lights.” This is an amazing opportunity for you to take the time to jump into reading the first few chapters of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. Each has unique details about the glorious celebration of our Lord and Savior’s birth. While we hone in on “different bulbs” of light, we hope you can study the birth of Jesus with fresh eyes and an open heart.

John 1:1-5 records, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”***

2. When John says ***“in the beginning”*** what is he referring to? Why is this significant?

3. What was there ***“in the beginning?”***

John 1:14 adds, ***“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”***

4. According to John, what were some ways John describes ***“the Word?”***

5. Who is ***“the Word?”*** How does each of the descriptions John uses point to Him?

Note: Just to point something out that has been a burden on me. If you knew this answer, please do not assume everyone did. One major shortcoming of the church is we do not create a safe place for growing Christians. If we chuckle and mock the simplicity of that answer and assume “everyone should know that,” we fail. Imagine if a person sitting next to you was not raised in a Bible-teaching church. Be careful. Let us not be a church that looks down at those who are growing.

One of the greatest disservices the church has ever allowed is that it has allowed the beauty and splendor of deeper study to be reserved for the academic. I disdain that kind of thinking because

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

when properly taught, theology can illuminate the depth of truth that can help grow a person's relationship with God to an amazing level. Jesus does say to worship with Spirit and Truth (John 4:24). We are going to jump into some deeper thoughts to see the depth of Jesus being the Light.

John begins his prologue with ***“the Word.”*** In John's original language, Greek, John uses the word “Logos.” While this idea has roots in Hellenistic (Greek) Philosophy, John's usage of this word is not dependent on worldly philosophical tradition.

“The Word,” or “logos” that John is talking about is the source of all life and all creation. However, for John “logos” is not just a philosophical thought; “logos” was a person. If we jump back to the Gospel of John, we read, ***“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”*** (John 1:4-5).

6. How did Jesus bring you life?

7. How did Jesus bring the light of men?

8. What does that light do?

LESSON ONE | JESUS IS THE LIGHT

Daniel Akin wrote, “The Logos brought light into the darkness of the primordial creation even as He brings light into our world of spiritual darkness; he brought life into the lifeless world of the original creation even as He brings life to those who are spiritually dead.”

There is nothing quite as visually tantalizing as the twinkle of Christmas lights. As excited as we may get when we see Christmas lights and other decorations going up, we should be more excited to show others the true light that lives in us this season.

9. How can people see the light we have inside us?

***“For by him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—
all things were created through him and for him.
And he is before all things, and in him all things hold
together.”***

Colossians 1:16-17

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

LESSON ONE | JESUS IS THE LIGHT

“AWAY IN A MANGER”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 1

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

When I think of Martin Luther, I envision this courageous German Monk wearing his robe with the hood bouncing on his back as he walks up to the church with a hammer in his hand. His battle was not with a physical building. Instead, he took on the abuse of the church which was abusing its position in order to gain power and money. They had created a belief system that you could earn or buy your way into Heaven. It was 1517 and he nailed his “95 Theses” to the church door which began the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther emphasized faith alone through Jesus Christ as the only means for salvation.

However, there was another side to Martin Luther. He composed a Christmas carol for his children entitled “*Luther’s Cradle Song*.” We know it as “*Away in a Manger*.”

Verse 1 paints such a peaceful beautiful scene:

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

Even though it was designed as a children’s song, verse 2 has created some frustration or dissatisfaction amongst Theologians:

*The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus! look down from the sky,
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.*

DEVOTION 1

Did anything jump out to you? It appears Luther is accused of emphasizing Jesus' divinity at the sake of His humanity by saying, "no crying he makes." Have you ever wondered if baby Jesus cried? John 11:35 is a verse you might end up memorizing today. It says, "**Jesus wept.**" Jesus as a man cried and Jesus as a baby cried. Jesus remained God as He also became man (and baby).

I am not sure how many people continue on to verse 3. It says:
*Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And take us to heaven to live with thee there.*

The last line tells the story. Jesus left Heaven to come to Earth so we could leave Earth and go with Him to Heaven. Sing this beautiful Christmas carol with child-like faith.

In 1 John 5:11, we rejoice, "**And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.**"

“DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 2

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

It was October of 1962. NFL legend Jerry Rice, boxer Evander Holyfield, and American drummer Tommy Lee were born while Johnny Carson hosted his first *“The Tonight Show”* and *“The Lucy Show”* premiered. However, it was also this month that the Cuban Missile Crisis was announced. On October 22, 1962, President John F. Kennedy addressed TV about Russian missile bases in Cuba and imposed a naval blockade on Cuba.

It was with this backdrop and because of the crisis that Noël Regney (lyrics) and Gloria Shayne (music) wrote *“Do You Hear What I Hear?”* The pair, married at the time, wrote it as a plea for peace. They hoped their song would distract people from the turmoil to the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding the traditional Christmas story.

Said the night wind to the little lamb:

“Do you see what I see?

Way up in the sky, little lamb

Do you see what I see?

A star, a star, dancing in the night

With a tail as big as a kite

With a tail as big as a kite”

It had to be an amazing sight. Can you imagine laying on a grassy hillside staring into the sky and seeing this star take center stage? It could have been such a sight where people asked, “Do you remember where you were ‘December 25th’ when that star lit up the night?”

DEVOTION 2

The carol has the little lamb talk to the shepherd boy and the shepherd boy talk to the mighty king. We know that angels went out of their way to appear to the shepherds to invite them to the greatest birthday party ever. Also, we know that it was not the shepherds who told the king where the real King would be born. However, I bet a lot of the shepherd boys knew that it would be Bethlehem as they had been told of Micah 5:2.

Finally, the famous carol closes:

Said the king to the people everywhere:

"Listen to what I say!

Pray for peace, people everywhere!

Listen to what I say!

The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night

He will bring us goodness and light

He will bring us goodness and light"

It is so important to think while we sing. King Herod did not say those words. He had his own form of missile launching as he ordered the killing of the baby boys.

However, with all that said, please do realize that Jesus is the One who brought and brings "goodness and light." Did you catch the middle of the stanza? They remind us to "pray for peace." That is a good reminder. Our country was in a crisis in 1962, has been often since then, and will be again. Yet, this season enjoy the lights and remember that Jesus came to earth bringing the opportunity for peace, goodness, light, and hope.

“GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 3

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Today, I was standing in line at Meijer when the man standing in front of me turned around and said, “Hi.” I greeted him and he went on to tell me that he had just registered to get the vaccine. I nodded as he went on to tell me that he was 79 and his wife 77 (I am not sure he was allowed to share that). I mentioned he definitely was in the group to get it. He then explained his wife’s physical battles and how he had started having open-heart surgeries going back when he was 50. I simply stated, “Wow, God must still have you on earth for a reason.” He said, “Yes, to tell jokes.”

I think there is great value in encouraging others and that can often come through humor, but we have a larger calling on earth. Humor should not be an end in itself. “*Go Tell It On The Mountain*” reminds us of our calling.

*Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!*

The verses speak of the shepherds watching their sheep when the light appeared. Not only was there a star, but angels made their entrance. The scene started in fear but ended in a victorious anthem by the angelic choir. Finally, verse three mentions that “*God sent us salvation.*”

What I left out from my introduction was that the man then told me a dirty joke. Although I was wearing a mask, he could tell I was not

DEVOTION 3

smiling, so he told me a clean joke. He appeared quite proud of himself as he walked off.

I wonder, “Why am I not so bold with the Gospel?” I think you too can relate. We are called to be the light of the world and even to be set on a hill so others can see (Matthew 5:14-16), yet we muffle the truth by not saying anything worthwhile. Our walk and talk are to direct others to the good news *“that Jesus Christ is born,”* and that means *“God sent us salvation.”*

I encourage you to sing this carol with confidence and conviction. As you thrive or survive through this season, I hope you will remember Jesus’ command to us, ***“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:16).

“GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 4

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” has gone by several names:

Tidings of Comfort and Joy

Come All You Worthy Gentlemen

God Rest Ye, Merry Christians

God Rest You Merry People All

You might remember that this carol is mentioned in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), “... at the first sound of ‘God bless you, merry gentlemen! May nothing you dismay!’, Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.” This is clearly a Christmas classic with some valuable lessons to remind us of what is important.

“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” actually has seven verses. The carol is scripturally sound as it refers to Bethlehem, Mary, and a manger in verse two. Verse three has the angels coming to the shepherds. The story continues with the fear that is experienced by the shepherds to then being astounded that a Virgin gave birth (verse four). The shepherds leave immediately (verse five) and come to Bethlehem where they find Mary and the babe (verse six). The carol's last verse closes the celebration encouraging all to sing praises.

I appreciate that the title “Saviour” is used three times in this carol. He is the central figure of the story and that title is the central message!

You probably are ready and able to sing all of verse one:

God rest ye merry, gentlemen

Let nothing you dismay

DEVOTION 4

*Remember, Christ, our Saviour
Was born on Christmas day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy*

I find it funny that we keep saying “*comfort and joy*” when I realize not much of Jesus’ life was experienced in the area of comfort. I do not think Joseph and Mary were extremely comfortable that first night. However, that is a message for another time.

One phrase jumped out at me – “*To save us all from Satan’s power.*” This phrase is also found in verse four. This is the Gospel message. Due to our sin, Satan controls us as we are headed to be with him forever. Jesus steps into our world to “*save us all from Satan’s power.*” Jesus was born to die. He came to earth to die for our sins that by His grace and through our faith we could be saved. The story is all about Jesus and the battle that continues all around us and in us.

Remember, Ebenezer Scrooge is not the only one who says “Bah humbug” at Christmas time. Satan realizes the battle has been brought to him and it does not look good.

***“The God of peace
will soon crush Satan under your feet.
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”***

Romans 16:20

“HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 5

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” was written by Charles Wesley. He and his brother John were influential in the start of the Methodist church as their missionary zeal continued to explode. Charles is attributed with writing about 6,500 hymns. George Whitefield (or Whitfield) is also attributed to helping with some of the wording. His name is often associated with the Great Awakening (revival in the 1700s).

Therefore, it should not surprise us that this carol is rich with theology and sound teaching. Verse one says:

Hark! the herald angels sing:

“Glory to the newborn King!

Peace on earth and mercy mild

God and sinners reconciled”

Joyful, all ye nations rise

Join the triumph of the skies

With angelic hosts proclaim:

“Christ is born in Bethlehem”

Hark! the herald angels sing:

“Glory to the newborn King!”

I have a hard time reading the words without adding the music and singing it in my mind (I am still out of tune even in my mind). If we are not careful, we will flow right on by a key phrase, *“God and sinners reconciled.”*

Merriam-Webster defines reconciled as “to restore to friendship or harmony.” Jesus came to restore a broken relationship between sinful man and the Holy God.

DEVOTION 5

The word reconcile is used thirteen times in the New Testament. Romans 5:11 says, ***“More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*** We receive reconciliation with God ***“through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** In 2 Corinthians 5:19, Paul adds, ***“That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”*** Again, we read that we are reconciled in Christ to God.

Another beautiful aspect of this carol is the titles that are given for Jesus even though it is only three verses long - Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, Son of Righteousness, Godhead, Incarnate Deity, Christ (three times), and King (four times in three verses).

Enjoy singing about Jesus, ***“Glory to the newborn King!”***

“I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 6

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“I Heard the Bells On Christmas Day” is based on the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow entitled, *“Christmas Bells.”* It was in the 1860s and the American Civil War was playing out before his eyes. Longfellow’s oldest son had already been severely injured in the war when he literally heard Church bells ringing on Christmas day.

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play;
In music sweet the tones repeat,
“There’s peace on earth, good will to men.”*

This sounds so sweet and innocent until I pause and listen as countrymen and even relatives kill each other. Peace and good will to men would not have seemed possible.

*I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along th’ unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

Was Christendom or believers divided on the issues? Could politics cause friction within the body of Christ?

*And in despair I bowed my head:
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”*

DEVOTION 6

I feel his pain as he searches for hope. The actions of the world seem to speak hatred and mock the concept of peace and caring about others above ourselves.

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor does He sleep,
For Christ is here; His Spirit near
Brings peace on earth, good will to men."*

This is fabulous. He listens as the bells ring louder on his heart and mind reminding him that God is alive and awake. God is still in control. He is present.

*When men repent and turn from sin
The Prince of Peace then enters in,
And grace imparts within their hearts
His peace on earth, good will to men.*

I appreciate how he calls for our lives to be changed. We need to repent from our ways and turn toward the Prince of Peace. The last two verses end up talking about the Word of God bringing light and life as both also end with the concept of *"peace on earth, good will to men."*

As I let these seven verses sink in, I realized that he used the word peace nine times. As the war continued to create losses, he mentioned what we and every beauty pageant desires, "World Peace."

However, more important than world peace is to be at peace with God. Romans 5:1 says, ***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Peace with God only comes through the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

Once we have peace with God, we can also enjoy the peace of God. Philippians 4:7 adds, ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

Peace with God and the peace of God is what can bring *“peace on earth, good will to men.”*

LESSON TWO

NOTICING THE LIGHT

PASTOR RYAN STORY



CHRISTMAS LIGHT

The time and money some people put into Christmas decorations are mind-boggling.

1. By now, how many of us can honestly say we no longer are awestruck by the Christmas decorations? Why does this happen?

Years ago, my brother lived in Poughkeepsie, New York. It was less than an hour by train ride into the heart of New York City. For about three years I would frequently drive to visit my brother every few months and we would spend the day in the city. I was always awestruck visiting the city and seeing new sights. I became pretty familiar with the city, but by no means I would say I was a "New Yorker," though I could navigate the city pretty well. In 2010, I had an opportunity to go to New York for a Young Adults mission trip. After our first day of work, we had the evenings to go sightseeing, and a small group of us wanted to go to Times Square. I was comfortable enough to lead through the subway and get us to our destination. After zig-zagging blocks that I knew to get us there, we finally walked into the heart of Times Square. I turned back and everyone was in awe at everything that Times Square had to offer at night. The light is so massive in Times Square at night one could hardly notice that the sun was in fact down. At that moment, I learned a very important lesson. I was the only one who was not awestruck by the lights. Sadly, I learned that night that familiarity can decrease awe.

2. How can familiarity decrease awe in terms of our relationship with Jesus?

John 1:9-13 says, ***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

3. How is it that ***“his own people did not receive him?”***

4. How do we receive Him? What do we become when we receive Him?

5. Have you ever gotten to a place in your walk with Jesus where your relationship with Jesus has become too familiar and you have lost your awe factor in your light application?

To ensure we are still keeping this study of Christmas familiar, we are going to jump to the Gospel of Matthew. While John and Matthew were recounting the same truth about Jesus, they had some different truths they wanted to share about Christ. While both were inspired by the Holy Spirit, John does not talk much about Jesus' "physical" birth; however, Matthew does.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

In Matthew 2:1-2, we read, ***“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’”***

6. Outside of Mary and Joseph, according to Matthew, who are the first to come to visit Jesus? Where did they come from and why is this significant?

7. What was the initial signal for the wise men that indicated the King of the Jews was born? Is it possible we call this a Christmas light?

Matthew 2:3-8 continues, ***“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.’”***

8. If the Jews were the ones with the Torah and the writings from the Prophets, how is it they missed the birth of Jesus?

John 1:9-13 records, ***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

9. What is needed to receive the true light?

One of the scariest misses I can think of is being in a place where we stop noticing the light that only comes from Jesus. Even during this holiday season, we can get wrapped up in the grandeur we miss out on seeing the true beauty of the season. Like a guy walking into Times Square, I pray this Christmas season is filled with awe.

10. How can we keep the awe for Jesus during this Christmas season?

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

LESSON TWO | NOTICING THE LIGHT

“I WONDER AS I WANDER”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 7

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“I Wonder As I Wander” is written by folklorist John Jacob Niles. I love how he got the idea for the song. In *“Notes for an Unfinished Autobiography,”* Niles wrote:

“‘I Wonder As I Wander’ grew out of three lines of music sung for me by a girl who called herself Annie Morgan. The place was Murphy, North Carolina, and the time was July 1933. The Morgan family, revivalists all, were about to be ejected by the police, after having camped in the town square for some little time, cooking, washing, hanging their wash from the Confederate monument and generally conducting themselves in such a way as to be classed a public nuisance. Preacher Morgan and his wife pled poverty; they had to hold one more meeting in order to buy enough gas to get out of town. It was then that Annie Morgan came out—a tousled, unwashed blond, and very lovely. She sang the first three lines of the verse of *“I Wonder As I Wander.”* At twenty-five cents a performance, I tried to get her to sing all the song. After eight tries, all of which are carefully recorded in my notes, I had only three lines of verse, a garbled fragment of melodic material—and a magnificent idea.”

Please try to envision this little girl going about her chores, oblivious to those around, as she sings this little song.

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus, the Saviour, did come for to die.
For poor, ornery people like you and like I
I wonder as I wander
Out under the sky.*

DEVOTION 7

*When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cows' stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages
It did then recall.*

*If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing:
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing;
Or all of God's angels in heaven to sing,
He surely could have had it,
'Cause He was the King!*

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus, the Saviour, did come for to die.
For poor, ornery people like you and like I
I wonder as I wander
Out under the sky.*

This Christmas season please wonder as you wander about Jesus coming to die for us. He died for ornery people like us. His birthplace was nothing fancy which I am sure Annie Morgan could relate. As King, He could have asked for anything, but He kept it simple and the angels came to sing. Jesus came to be our Savior. He was born to die – for us.

As you are tempted to get caught up in the hustle and bustle, think about what you are thinking about – wonder while you wander.

“IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 8

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” was written by Edmund Sears in 1849. It is said that Sears, a pastor in Wayland, Massachusetts, wrote this carol during a period of personal sadness.

*It came upon the midnight clear
That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold*

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

This carol is actually ten verses long. I find it interesting that although he was suffering from depression, he wrote about angels singing. Five times he mentions angels singing. This sounds like good therapy.

Scripture often speaks of angels singing. At this time of year, we often refer to what happened at Jesus’ birth, ***“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’*** (Luke 2:13-14).

This is not the first time Scripture records angels singing. Job 38:7 references creation, ***“When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”*** Isaiah 6:1-3 also shares their

activity, ***“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’”***

It will not be the last time angels sing. John writes about the future in Revelation 5:11-12, ***“Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’”*** John adds in Revelation 15:3-4, ***“And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.’”***

It appears God likes singing. We need to join the angels in worshipping the Lord.

***“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!
Serve the Lord with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!”***

Psalm 100:1

“JOY TO THE WORLD”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 9

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) has been called the “Godfather of English Hymnody” as he is credited with some 750 hymns. George Frederic Handel (Handel’s “Messiah”) is said to have also had an influence with Watts on the writing of “*Joy to the World*.”

*Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.*

*Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!

DEVOTION 9

My initial thought of this carol is the response of the wise men in Matthew 2:10, ***“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”*** This intrigues me as the educated unbelievers rejoiced (even great joy) at seeing the star even before they saw the Star.

However, the carol comes from a paraphrase of Psalm 98:4-9 by Watts (it appears in his famous collection, *“The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament”*). Psalm 98:4-9 says,

***“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!
Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!
Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwell in it!
Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.”***

The obvious application is for us to have great joy and rejoice this Christmas season because the Lord has come. However, please notice line three of verse one: *“Let every heart prepare Him room.”* When Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem not everyone rejected them, they just did not make room for Him. As we go through this season, we need to make sure we make room for the Savior in our hearts, minds, resources, energy, and schedules.

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!

“LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 10

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“Love Came Down At Christmas” was written by Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894). She not only wrote this carol, but also poems, prayers, and children’s books often under the pseudonym Ellen Alleyne. It is believed that she never married or had children and that she suffered poor health from age 16. Her deep faith is thought to be partially due to the comfort she found in writing.

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine
Love was born at Christmas,
Stars and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine
Love was born at Christmas,
Stars and angels gave the sign.*

Rossetti used the word love 17 times in these four short verses. I am surprised more Christmas carols do not speak of God’s love more

DEVOTION 10

since the Bible uses the word 684 times. Christmas is clearly a time of love. It is not just an excellent time to express and show love to one another, but it is clearly a time when God gave His Son to us in love. John 3:16 says, ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”***

It is believed that “Love Came Down At Christmas” was based on 1 John 4:7-11, ***“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”***

God loves us.

We are to love God.

We are to love one another.

*“Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine”*

“MARY, DID YOU KNOW?”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 11

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

My favorite Christmas carol is probably “Mary, Did You Know?” I appreciate the pace, theology, and how it makes one wonder.

*Mary, did you know
that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know
that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know
that your Baby Boy has come to make you new?
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you.*

The song goes on to say the blind will see, storms will be calmed, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again, lame will leap, and the dumb will speak. This Lamb is Creator and will rule again. He is the Great I Am!

It is intriguing to speculate what Mary was thinking. Luke 1:28-33 says, ***“And he [the angel Gabriel] came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’”***

I love her response in verse 34, ***“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’”*** She does not get giddy or evaluate her son being king; she gets to the basics. She knows it is humanly impossible for her to be pregnant.

The story continues in verse 35, ***“And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.’”*** The angel Gabriel tells her that her child will be ***“the Son of God.”*** First of all, she had to be blown away that she was talking with a literal angel (it gives a whole new meaning to, “You had me at hello!”). Next, she is told that she will give birth to the Son of God by the Holy Spirit. Mary had a lot to think about.

When the shepherds arrived celebrating at the manger scene, Luke 2:19 records, ***“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”*** Later, when Jesus was twelve and stayed with the religious leaders talking “shop,” Luke 2:51 records, ***“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.”*** Mary had a lot to think about. I imagine it was a daily event.

In Luke 1:46-48, Mary records her response in a song, ***“And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.’”***

It appears Mary had a concept that she was carrying and gave birth to the Savior of the World. Yes, she “created” her Creator.

What about you? Are you taking time to think about what Jesus did and why He did it? It is clear from history that He died (and rose

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

again) and Scripture says it was for us (in our place). The ultimate Christmas gift is salvation from God through Jesus. Think about it!

DEVOTION 11

“MARY’S BOY CHILD”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 12

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“*Mary’s Boy Child*” was written by Jester Hairston. It is believed that the song started as a birthday party song for a friend. Some years later, he changed the lyrics to what we have now. Harry Belafonte heard the Christmas carol being performed by a choir and sought permission to record it. Verse one says,

*Long time ago in Bethlehem
So the Holy Bible say
Mary’s Boy Child, Jesus Christ
Was born on Christmas Day!*

“*Mary’s Boy Child*” goes on to talk about the shepherds, the bright new shining star, angel’s singing, Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem, and that there was no room for them.

This carol closes with verse seven saying.
*Trumpets sound and angels sing,
Listen to what they say!
That man will live forevermore
Because of Christmas Day!*

One phrase jumped out at me, “*That man will live forevermore.*” This “forevermore” is also referenced in the fifth verse. Jesus came to earth to die so we could live – forevermore. Jesus offers eternal life.

The Bible talks about “forevermore” often. In the Gospel of John, we see this concept of eternal life referenced seventeen times. I think it is worth taking the time to review them.

“That whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:15

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:36

“But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:14

“Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.” John 4:36

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” John 5:39

“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” John 6:27

“For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:40

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."

John 6:47

"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:54

"Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'" John 6:68

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." John 10:28

"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." John 12:25

"And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me." John 12:50

"Since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." John 17:2

"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John 17:3

I like the movie *Sandlot* and a young boy referenced as Squints says, "For-ev-er, for-ev-er, for-ev-er." Eternal life is forever. Check the verses again, this life is only through Jesus the Christ.

LESSON THREE

RECEIVING THE LIGHT

PASTOR RYAN STORY



CHRISTMAS LIGHT

One of my favorite parts of Christmas is imparting a few family traditions to my children. One tradition that both my sons seemed to enjoy was making countdown rings. If you are unfamiliar with countdown rings, it is when you connect a certain amount of paper rings together and remove one ring a day until the day you are celebrating arrives. While making these is a bit time-consuming, it does help my children see how many days until Christmas. I enjoy watching my sons take a ring off, count the remaining rings, and tell me how many days until Christmas. Making these rings seems to keep them expectedly patient through the Christmas season.

1. What is your family's way of helping the days before Christmas pass quicker?

One Christmas pet peeve of mine is when I see wise men at the nativity scene. I can understand the merit and the account found in the Gospel of Matthew, but the timeline of wise men from the east visiting baby Jesus does not fit. On top of that, if we continue reading the Gospel of Luke past the angels and the shepherds we find a person who should be in more nativity scenes. That man was Simeon.

Luke 2:21-24 says, ***“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’”***

LESSON THREE | RECEIVING THE LIGHT

2. Why did Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple?

Luke 2:25-26 continues, ***“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”***

3. Why could we infer that Simeon had the right standing with God?

One major theological takeaway we must have is the details about the Holy Spirit. While every mention of the Holy Spirit should cause us to pause and ensure proper understanding, the details with Simeon are worth noting.

4. Where does the Bible say the Holy Spirit “was” in relation to Simeon? What is the difference between that and the way the Holy Spirit resides with us?

5. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to Simeon? Was that good news or bad news?

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

Luke continues, ***“And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel’”*** (Luke 2:27-32).

6. What is the significance of these verses?

7. How is it that Simeon put so much emphasis on a baby boy?

Luke 2:33-35 concludes, ***“And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.’”***

8. If you were Mary or Joseph, how would you have handled these moments?

LESSON THREE | RECEIVING THE LIGHT

The most amazing part of this entire moment is that it encapsulates the entirety of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit Who revealed to the prophets that the Messiah would one day be born also revealed to a temple priest that the “Consolation of Israel” was swaddled up in His mother’s arms. Then Simeon, whom the Holy Spirit was upon, brought him into the room and proceeds to say that the child was ***“appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*** To be extra pointed, Simeon tells Mary that “a sword will pierce through your own soul also” in reference to the eventual death of Jesus on the Cross.

John 1:9-13 says, ***“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

9. How was it that Simeon was able to see the light of Jesus, despite the fact that Jesus was just an infant?

10. What must a person do to become a child of God? Have you done that?

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

While we all may want to put a countdown on various events and celebratory moments, there is only one day that we all live in, and that day is today. If you want more information about what the Holy Spirit might be revealing to you about Jesus please reach out to any of our staff or a Pastor for help guiding you closer to Jesus.

LESSON THREE | RECEIVING THE LIGHT

“O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 13

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

John Francis Wade (1711-1786) composed both the Latin words and the music for “*O Come All Ye Faithful*.” After the initial work, it is said to be a collaboration of several people. A lot of the English language translation is the work of Frederick Oakeley, under the title, “Let us go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass.” It is taken from Luke 2:15, “***When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.’***” There are three main verses with each being followed by the chorus.

*O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;*

*O Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing all that hear in heaven God's holy word.
Give to our Father glory in the Highest;*

*All Hail! Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning,
O Jesus! for evermore be Thy name adored.
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;*

DEVOTION 13

Chorus:

*O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.*

The word “adore” is fascinating. *Merriam-Webster* defines it as to worship or honor as a deity or as divine, to regard with loving admiration and devotion, and to be very fond of. Some synonyms are to cherish, love, worship, admire, delight in, fall for, dig, esteem, exalt, glorify, honor, prize, reverence, treasure, be crazy about, be mad for, be nuts about, be serious about, be smitten with, be stuck on, be wild about, dote on, and flip over. Do any of these words or phrases capture your mind as you think about adoring the Lord this Christmas season?

The shepherds' response reminds me of Psalm 122:1, ***“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’”***

How would you have felt if you were one of the shepherds who saw and heard the angels on that first Christmas night? How fast would you have traveled to Bethlehem? What would have been going through your mind? In what ways will you come to behold and adore Jesus this Christmas?

***“And you shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your mind
and with all your strength.”***

Mark 12:30

“O COME LET US ADORE HIM”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 14

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

As we read yesterday, John Francis Wade wrote the beautiful Christmas carol entitled, “*O Come, All Ye Faithful*.” He declared many wondrous truths in that carol, but then he always returned to the chorus, where he wrote, “*O come, let us adore Him*.” It became a hymn in its own right. There is a lot of repetition in this carol for the sake of emphasis.

Verses one, two, five, and seven:

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

O come let us adore Him

Christ, The Lord

Verses three and eight:

For You alone are worthy

For You alone are worthy

For You alone are worthy

You're Christ, You're the Christ, You The Lord

Verses four and nine:

We'll give You all the glory

Jesus will give You all the glory

We'll give You all, all the glory

Christ, The Lord

We have already discussed the word “adore,” but Wade adds another concept. He moves from focusing on our attitude and action to the Lord who is receiving the worship. He alone is worthy!

DEVOTION 14

Christmas needs to be about Jesus, not us. We should have the same attitude as John the Baptist when speaking of the Lord, ***“Even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie”*** (John 1:27). We are so inferior to the Lord. Creation is not equal to the Creator. However, we can and should worship Him, for He is worthy.

Revelation 4:11 says, ***“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*** The Lord created us and is still involved in our daily walk. He is amazing.

Revelation 5:9 adds, ***“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”*** This verse reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice for us. He ransomed us. He paid our way.

Finally, Revelation 5:12 says, ***“Saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’”*** He alone is worthy!

***“I call upon the Lord,
who is worthy to be praised.”***

Psalm 18:3a

“O COME, O COME EMMANUEL”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 15

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

It is believed “*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*” was written in Latin by an anonymous Monk about 1200 years ago. In 1851, John Mason Neale translated it from Latin to English and called it “*Draw nigh, draw nigh, Emmanuel.*” Eventually, it became known as, “*O Come, O come, Emmanuel.*”

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

The name Emmanuel (also spelled Immanuel) is so meaningful. Isaiah 7:14 prophesied about the Messiah (Jesus) coming, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”** Matthew 1:23 records this completed prophecy and also defines Immanuel for us, **“‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).”** Since Jesus is God, then when He came to earth, it meant God came to earth. God was with us!

The other verses of “*O Come, O Come Emmanuel*” refer to Jesus as the Lord of Might, Rod of Jesse, the Day-Spring, the Key of David, and the Lord. It is profitable to see the Bible verses associated with these titles.

In Exodus 19:16, we read of the Lord of Might, ***“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.”*** I imagine the scene would have been breathtaking and quite intimidating.

Isaiah 11:1 refers to the root (historians feel the songwriter took some liberty in saying rod) of Jesse, ***“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.”*** Isaiah 11:10 adds, ***“In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”***

In Numbers 24:17, Moses writes of a star (also referred to as Dayspring or Morning Star by some) that shall rise with Scepter, ***“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”***

Finally, the writer of this carol references the Key of David. Isaiah 22:22 says, ***“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”***

I know some of the titles can seem like a stretch from the verses. I think they refer to it as “poetic freedom” or “poetic license.” I am not going to argue with a monk who wrote 1200 years ago or with Neale on how he translated the words of the carol from Latin to English. My goal is that we think of what we are singing. There are some beautiful references and titles of Jesus that should help us see Him, appreciate Him, and worship Him in a deeper way.

“O HOLY NIGHT”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 16

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“O Holy Night” was composed by French poet Placide Cappeau in 1843. Twelve years later in Boston, John Sullivan Dwight (well-known classical music critic) changed some of the lyrics slightly as he translated this carol from French into English.

O Holy Night

The stars are brightly shining

It is the night of our dear Savior's birth

Long lay the world in sin and e'er pining

'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices

For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

Fall on your knees O hear the angels voices.

O night divine O night when Christ was born

O night divine, O night, O night divine.

He goes on to talk about the light of faith, the cradle, wise men, and the King of Kings before singing the next stanza.

He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger,

Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

The rest of this carol speaks about loving one another, His law of love, His Gospel, peace, and that Christ is Lord. The parts that stand out to me the most are “fall on your knees” and “Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!”

DEVOTION 16

It reminds me of an all-time favorite worship song by MercyMe, “*I Can Only Imagine*.”

*Surrounded by Your glory
What will my heart feel
Will I dance for You, Jesus
Or in awe of you be still
Will I stand in your presence
Or to my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah
Will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine
I can only imagine hey ya ah*

It is safe to say that dancing will not be my first choice. I think we will all fall to our knees in the presence of Jesus. Actually, Philippians 2:9-11 says that both believer and unbeliever we fall to their knees, ***“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***

Romans 14:10-12 adds, ***“Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”***

We have a choice. First, we can bow to Jesus today, see Him at the Bema Seat (we will bow again) where He gives us potential rewards and places us in Heaven forever. Second, we can deny Him

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

or ignore Him, meet Him at the Great White Throne Judgment, bow before Him (but it is too late), have our works evaluated (all fall short of the glory of God), and end up in Hell and the Lake of Fire forever.

*Fall on your knees
O hear the angels voices.
O night divine
O night when Christ was born*

DEVOTION 16

“O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 17

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

In 1865, after a trip to Bethlehem, Phillips Brooks wrote “*O Little Town of Bethlehem*” for the Sunday school children at Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. *Discipleship Ministries* posted an article entitled, “*History of Hymns: ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem.’*” Dr. Hawn records, “According to the story, Brooks traveled on horseback between Jerusalem and Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.

‘Before dark we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the star. It is a fenced piece of ground with a cave in it, in which, strangely enough, they put the shepherds...Somewhere in those fields we rode through, the shepherds must have been. As we passed, the shepherds were still ‘keeping watch over their flocks,’ or leading them home to fold.’”

It was his goal to help children put themselves on the scene. This has great value.

He gently sets the tone in verse one.

O little town of Bethlehem

How still we see Thee lie

Above Thy deep and dreamless sleep

The silent stars go by

Verse two expresses that Jesus is the answer to our “*hopes and fears.*” Put yourself there thinking of your goals and concerns and give them to the special baby.

DEVOTION 17

*Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in Thee tonight*

Brooks references our sin and misery, but verse eight gives a beautiful image. Think of “charity” holding open the door for you. God’s love paved the way. Look at love. Place “charity” in your visual nativity scene.

*Where charity stands watching
And faith holds wide the door
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks
And Christmas comes once more*

As you kneel to the Savior in the manger, acknowledge your sin, seek forgiveness, and turn from your sin as you follow Him. You can be born again because of His birth.

*O Holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born in us today*

Finally, in the tenth and final verse, pause from your hectic schedule that has your feet and mind racing through life. Listen to the angels singing. Allow yourself to be awed as you realize you are in the presence of God.

*We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us
Our Lord Emmanuel*

“SILENT NIGHT”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 18

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

Are you familiar with the Christmas truce of 1914? Although World War I did not end until 1918, Michael Ray writes for the *Britannica* that there was a pause of the war right before Christmas in 1914. German soldiers started singing “*Stille Nacht*” (“*Silent Night*”) and the British soldiers responded with some Christmas carols too as they took a “timeout” from the battle.

I am pretty sure that Josef Mohr (poetry) and Franz Gruber (music) had no idea the power their song would have. Howard Culbertson writes for *Southern Nazarene University* that “*Silent Night*” was written because of a broken church organ. He writes, “In 1818, a roving band of actors was performing in towns throughout the Austrian Alps. On December 23 they arrived at Oberndorf, a village near Salzburg where they were to re-enact the story of Christ’s birth in the small Church of St. Nicholas.” Since the organ was broken (due to mice or rust), the Christmas drama was performed in a home. Assistant Pastor took a longer route to the house where he could overlook the village. Everything was silent. He wrote this poem – carol. The song was translated to English in 1863 by John Freeman Young.

Envision that night. Mary’s labor pains are over. The animals have settled down for the night. Joseph is beaming as he looks upon his glowing wife and “perfect” son. Everything is peaceful, calm, and silent. The only sound might be angels softly singing.

*Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child*

DEVOTION 18

*Holy infant, tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

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

*Silent night, Holy night
Shepherds quake, at the sight
Glories stream from heaven above
Heavenly, hosts sing Hallelujah.
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born.*

This Christmas please take time to "be still and know that He is God."
The noises are as extreme as battle cries in a war to a church organ.
Turn off everything and sit in silence as you cherish time with the
Savior of the World.

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

LESSON FOUR

SHARING THE LIGHT

PASTOR RYAN STORY



CHRISTMAS LIGHT

The year 2020 brought a lot of “new” to everyone’s life, mine included. My two sons would have been entering Young Fives and 3-year-old preschool in the fall of 2020. My wife and I prayed about sending them to school and did not feel God wanted us to send them. Luckily for my family, my wife is an amazing elementary teacher, so we sought out homeschool options. We found a good Christian curriculum and we (let me be totally honest, my wife, but we are one flesh in the eyes of God, so I get points) began to juggle life, jobs, and school inside our house.

One day, my wife was going over the days of creation and she said a statement that I have never heard before and I almost put on the theological breaks to this newly purchased curriculum. While my wife was teaching about the fourth day of creation I heard, “John the Baptist was the moon.” This caused me to stop cooking dinner and pop my head into our makeshift schoolroom.

1. What do you know about John the Baptist?

There is an awesome opportunity if you would like to learn more about John, The River Church did an entire series called “*Johnny Be Good.*” Feel free to utilize the sermons and the devotions to help grow in your Bible reading.

John 1:6-8 says, “***There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.***”

LESSON FOUR | SHARING THE LIGHT

2. What details does John (the beloved) write about John (the baptizer)?

3. What does it mean to bear witness to something? How did John do that with Jesus?

4. Now it is time to circle back to the whole John the Baptist was the moon idea. What does John specifically say that John the Baptist was not?

5. In terms of how our Solar System works, what is the primary light source in our Solar System?

Because planets, moons, and other satellites (any object in space that orbits or circles around a bigger object) do not have nuclear fusion, they do not produce their own light. Instead, the shine we see is because of the light reflected from a star.

6. How is it we see the moon?

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

7. How is it that John the Baptist could be considered the moon?

Now here is the kicker that had me pondering the depth of a statement designed for a kindergarten student that floored me as a Christ-following grown man.

When is it that we cannot see the moon? The time when we cannot see the moon is when the Earth is blocking the light from reflecting the light of the Sun. It is impossible for the moon to shine if there are things blocking its view of its light source. The same is true for us.

John the Baptist is known by Jesus as the “greatest man born of women.” John’s life purpose was to be the one who prepared a way for others to know about Jesus, and I do not think that is something we can put on the select few who really love Jesus.

Matthew 28:18-20 says, ***“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”***

When we know the Light, we must share the Light by ensuring others can see the true Light.

8. What are some ways we can share the Light?

“SWEET LITTLE JESUS BOY”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 19

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“Sweet Little Jesus Boy” was composed by lawyer Robert MacGimsey and published in 1934 by Carl Fischer Music. Although white, his intent in writing “Sweet Little Jesus Boy” was to portray it as an American slave song. Jeff Westover wrote an article “What You Do Not Know About Sweet Little Jesus Boy” in which he mentions that MacGimsey was saddened by the drunken parties by so many during the Christmas season. It was in total contrast to the simplicity of the spirituals that his nanny (Aunt Becky – an African American lady) sang to him as a child.

The first two of four verses say:

*Sweet little Jesus boy
They made you be born in a manger
Sweet little holy child
We didn't know who you were
Didn't know you'd come to save us Lord
To take our sins away
Our eyes were blind, we could not see
We didn't know who you were*

*Long time ago
You were born
Born in a manger Lord
Sweet little Jesus boy
The world treats you mean Lord
Treats me mean too
But that's how things are down here
We don't know who you are*

DEVOTION 19

Slavery is sickening. The idea of someone “owning” another person is disturbing. However, I love the stories of people who sing in spite of their circumstances.

Christmas is not an easy time for everyone. There can be financial hardships or emotional setbacks. It is a common time to experience deep pain as we reminisce about missing loved ones who have passed recently or years ago. It can be frustrating and painful, but one of the greatest remedies is singing praises to God. I am challenged and encouraged by the response of “prisoners” Paul and Silas to injustice in Acts 16:25, ***“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.”*** They praised God from prison (and He heard them).

***“Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”***

Habakkuk 3:17-18

It is Christmas time. Place your focus, energy, celebration, and worship on the *“Sweet Little Jesus Boy.”*

“THE FIRST NOEL”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 20

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

I wonder how many people sing *“The First Noel”* because they enjoy the music even though they do not know what “Noel” means. Noël is the French word for Christmas and is from the Latin “natalis” meaning “birthday.”

Lindsay Lowe wrote an interesting article entitled, *“The Surprisingly Controversial History of the ‘Happy Birthday’ Song.”* In the 1890s, Patty Hill and her sister, Mildred, composed a song that would be simple enough to sing with Patty’s kindergarten students. The original lyrics that accompanied the familiar “Happy Birthday” tune were:

*Good morning to you
Good morning to you
Good morning dear teacher,
Good morning to all*

Lowe wrote, “Using the same melody, her kindergarten students would sometimes swap in different lyrics, including the *‘Happy Birthday’* lyrics we know today.” It is silly to find that several lawsuits resulted in who would get the copyright and royalties for “Happy Birthday.”

“The First Noel” is basically a “Happy Birthday” to Jesus song. Verses one and two focus on the initial “party” guest:

*The First Noel, the Angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep*

DEVOTION 20

*On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!*

*They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the East beyond them far
And to the earth it gave great light
And so it continued both day and night.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!*

Verses three through six include the wise men. Even though the writer mistakenly viewed the wise men as only three guests, he does point out that the wise men brought three gifts. I imagine as Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt these gifts helped them adapt and survive.

A tradition I carried from my childhood into having a family of my own is having a birthday cake for Jesus and singing “*Happy Birthday*” to Him. We share gifts in remembrance of gifts given in the first Noel, but also as a thankfulness of the gift of salvation Jesus bought and brought for us.

This Christmas celebrate Jesus and His birthday!

“THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 21

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“The Little Drummer Boy” has children and adults alike singing a nonsensical phrase some twenty-one times in its twenty-one lines – “rum pum pum pum.” Feel free to add hand motions or a make-shift drum as you stroll through the verses.

*Come they told me, pa rum pum pum pum
A new born King to see, pa rum pum pum pum
Our finest gifts we bring, pa rum pum pum pum
To lay before the King, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,*

*So to honor Him, pa rum pum pum pum,
When we come.*

*Baby Jesus, pa rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too, pa rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring, pa rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give the King, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,*

*Shall I play for you, pa rum pum pum pum,
On my drum?*

*Mary nodded, pa rum pum pum pum
The ox and lamb kept time, pa rum pum pum pum
I played my drum for Him, pa rum pum pum pum
I played my best for Him, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,*

DEVOTION 21

Then He smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum.

One of the ending phrases encouraged me – “*He smiled at me.*” Do you pause through the day and realize that God does smile? Are our actions lending themselves to His approval and even happiness?

In Colossians 3:23, Paul writes about living life as if you have an audience of One, ***“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.”*** God is not like that “impossible to please” authority figure we all have experienced. Actually, His desire (and our goal) is found in His words recorded in Matthew 25:21, ***“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’”***

I want the last line of my biography to go something like this:

Jesus said,
“Well done, good and faithful servant.”
“Then He smiled at me!”

“WE THREE KINGS”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 22

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

“We Three Kings,” also known as *“We Three Kings of Orient Are,”* is a Christmas carol that was written by John Henry Hopkins Jr. in 1857 for a Christmas nativity play.

Verse one starts off by acknowledging the gifts they are bringing. It is followed by the chorus (which is sung after every verse) saying:

*We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.*

*O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect Light.*

The original design was to have three different men sing verses two through four emphasizing their different gifts of gold (verse two), frankincense (verse three), and myrrh (verse four).

*Born a king on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.*

*Frankincense to offer have I.
Incense owns a Deity nigh.*

DEVOTION 22

*Prayer and praising all men raising,
Worship Him, God on high.*

*Myrrh is mine: Its bitter perfume
Breaths a life of gathering gloom.
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.*

Gifts often play a big role at Christmas time. There may be frustration and extensive work in finding the perfect gift, but once you see a loved one's sense of amazement and gratitude it is all worth it.

In 2 Corinthians 9:15, we read, ***"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"*** Christmas is the time to celebrate as God sent His Son who is and brings the gift of salvation. The awe should make us speechless but thankful.

Romans 6:23 explains the situation, ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** In and of ourselves, we are in a bad place headed for the worst place. However, Jesus steps in with a gift – it is even called a ***"free gift."*** Did you know Paul uses the phrase ***"free gift"*** six times in Romans?

The greatest response to receiving a gift is to express gratitude and then put it to use every day of your life. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh have their place, but nothing beats ***"eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."***

“WHAT CHILD IS THIS?”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 23

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

William Chatterton Dix wrote the lyrics to the Christmas carol *“What Child Is This?”* in 1865. It is only three verses long, but it is unique in how boldly he describes Jesus’ purpose for coming to earth in verse two:

*Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The Cross be borne for me, for you;
Hail, hail the Word Made Flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary!*

Most Christmas carols celebrate the birth of Jesus. That is obvious and makes sense. However, this carol talks about nails and a spear piercing Him. It references the cross! Jesus came to earth to die for our sins. He was born to die. Seldom do Christmas carols associate Jesus’ birth and death together.

Peter and Noble (a couple of my former students who are now pastors) made some interesting observations between Jesus’ “start and finish.”

DEVOTION 23

Birth

Womb
Mary
Virgin
Joseph
Linen
Angels
Frankincense, Myrrh
Wooden manger

Death

Tomb
Marys
Unused burial
Joseph of Arimathea
Linens
Angels
Ointments, spices
Wooden cross

Matthew 1:21 tells us why Jesus came to earth, ***“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*** Jesus was born to die in our place. He came to ***“save his people from their sins.”***

In 1 Timothy 1:15, this concept is repeated, ***“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”*** Jesus' birth is so special because it was the start of a life that would make for a perfect sacrifice in death. He died so we can live – forever.

“WITH US”

CHRISTMAS LIGHT, DEVOTION 24

Dr. Randy T. Johnson

When I think of Christmas carols, I tend to think of a song that is more than one hundred years old. I appreciate their message, heritage, and tradition, but writing strong Christian music is important today. In 2016, Life Church released a newer Christmas carol entitled “*With Us*.” Verses one and two cover from birth to death and to life again:

*Not a king adorned in splendor, robed in glory
But a baby in a manger born to save
Not a warrior who fights His way to power
But a friend who faced the cross to set us free*

*Wrapped in rags, receive the gift of heaven
With a word You bring the dead to life again
You were there from the beginning of creation
With a promise to be with us in the end*

The chorus reminds me of Matthew 1:23, **“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).”** Jesus coming to Earth (Christmas) meant God is with us:

*You are with us
You are with us
In every moment You are with us
You are Jesus
You are Jesus
In every moment You are with us*

DEVOTION 24

The bridge is from Romans 8:28, ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** It ties Christmas to our lives now:

*When we don't understand
We know You're working
For our good, For our good
We're trusting in Your plan
Your purpose always wins
You are with us, You are with us*

“*With Us*” is a great reminder that Jesus is with us even today. In Matthew 28:20, we read, ***“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*** Hebrews 13:5 repeats the teaching, ***“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*** Christmas means God is with us!

***“For I am convinced
that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor any other created thing,
will be able to separate us
from the love of God,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

Romans 8:38-39

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

