

LESSONS IN CAROLS

Lesson #	Sermon Date	Carol
Introduction	---	Study Overview
Lesson 1	November 29	“Creator of the Stars of Night”
Lesson 2	December 6	“Come Thou Long Expected Jesus”
Lesson 3	December 13	“How Great Our Joy”
Lesson 4	December 20	“Angels from the Realms of Glory”
Lesson 5	December 24	“O Little Town of Bethlehem”
Lesson 6	December 27	“Lo How a Rose E’er Blooming”
Lesson 7	January 3, 2021	“As with Gladness Men of Old”
Bonus:	---	Advent/Epiphany Activities for Families

LESSONS IN CAROLS - INTRODUCTION

Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany are special times that offer a variety of family and church traditions that draw us to a deeper spiritual life in Christ. Favorite music is one of those things! Three years ago, MLEPC had an Advent sermon/study series using favorite Christmas carols, and this year's study includes Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany hymns. As we reflect on the theology embedded in these hymns, we'll also be looking at each week's lectionary readings. The use of lectionary or scheduled readings from the scriptures can be traced back to the early church. Readings follow a three-year pattern, with each year focusing on one of the Gospels. The readings for the new Christian church year begin the first Sunday of Advent - Happy New Year everyone! 2021 is "Year B," where the Gospel of Mark is featured (although other Gospels are used for special occasions). Each Sunday, the lectionary includes a reading from the Old Testament, a Psalm, a Gospel, and one of the epistles. As you are working through these readings, you are taking part in a tradition that has been in place since the third century!

Advent is a time of preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth once again while preparing our hearts for Jesus' coming again. The word Advent comes from 1 Corinthians 16:22, the last verse of that letter. Paul writes, "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" The word for come is "Maran'athah", really two little words in Aramaic, meaning, "our Lord comes," or "is coming." In the Advent season, there is a tension between waiting to celebrate the birth of Jesus once again and being in this season where we are waiting for the Lord to come again. A quote from an Advent study titled *Awaiting the Already*, written by Magrey R. deVega, defines how we understand the season of Advent, "To prepare for the coming of Jesus once again in our lives is to live out the presence of Christ among us, right here and right now. To await Jesus is to acknowledge the Jesus who is already in our midst, and to fully live into his life, death and resurrection."

May this study allow us to enter the season of Advent with a better understanding of the historical events that led to the birth of Jesus. You are encouraged to embark on this journey with the MLEPC family. The best way to do this is to become part of a small group, where you can study each week with the collective wisdom of the group's members and be part of a fellowship of believers for prayer and support. If you are unable to be part of a small group, we encourage you to use this study for personal reflection as you prepare to listen to each week's sermon. There are no small group study questions for Christmas Eve, but the story behind "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is there for you to read along with the lectionary readings for Christmas Eve.

Because we are living in an unusual time, the study will be published on the MLEPC.org website for everyone to access remotely and print copies at home. However, we would be glad to print and send hard copies to those who need one, just call the church office, 412-531-3387, and we will make sure you receive a copy. Instead of a family page for each week, a list of 24 family activities is included at the end of this study. Scriptures used in the study are from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible for consistency, but it is helpful for participants in small group studies to have other versions of the Bible to compare and contrast wording.

LESSON 1 Week of November 29, 2020
“CREATOR OF THE STARS OF NIGHT” (J. M. Neale)

Creator of the stars of night, Thy people's everlasting Light;
Jesu, Redeemer, save us all, and hear thy servants when they call.

Thou, grieving that the ancient curse should doom to death a universe,
Hast found the med'cine, full of grace, to save and heal a ruin'd race.

Thou cam'st, the Bridegroom of the Bride, as drew the world to evening-tide;
Proceeding from a Virgin shrine, the spotless Victim all divine.

At whose dread Name, majestic now, all knees must bend, all hearts must bow
And things celestial Thee shall own, and things terrestrial, Lord alone.

O Thou, whose coming is with dread to judge and doom the quick and dead,
Preserve us, while we dwell below, from ev'ry insult of the foe.

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, Three in One,
Laud, honour, might, and glory be from age to age eternally. Amen.

“Creator of the Stars of Night” is a translation of a 7th-century Latin hymn first sung in monasteries during Advent as it anticipates the Second Advent in light of the history that led to Christ’s first coming. The first five verses describe Creation, the Fall, the Annunciation and Nativity, the atonement, the kingly rule of the ascended Christ, and a plea for Christ’s return in power and judgment. The sixth verse is a Doxology, praising God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The text above was originally translated into English by John Mason Neale, an evangelical English Anglican priest, scholar and hymnwriter. A second translation in 1940 became the four verses sung in churches today. Verse 2 of the 1940 translation possibly replaces Verse 3 above:

When this old world drew on toward night, You came, but not in splendor bright.
Not as a monarch, but the child of Mary, blameless mother mild.

This translation, however, loses the richness of the prophetic nature of Christ’s atoning work. We don’t hear the word “victim” in Christmas carols, but note how the original translation mentions both the “Temple” imagery of the Virgin Mary (virgin shrine) and its culmination, relating Christ to the Passover sacrifice as the “spotless Victim.” Verse 4 above is based on Philippians 2:10-11 as the Apostle Paul writes, “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.”

“Creator of the Stars of Night” is considered a plainsong, a type of church music sung in unison in medieval modes and in free rhythm. This hymn’s melody is simple, singable, and beautiful and connects us to believers from over 1,000 years ago.

Scriptures: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Advent Theme: Peace

As you begin the week’s study, consider these questions and share with your group as you are comfortable doing so.

- What is your most peaceful memory of a Christmas past?
- Where do you hope to find peace in the Advent/Christmas season to come?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 1 – CREATOR OF THE STARS OF NIGHT

1. In "Creator of the Stars of Night" as printed in this study, where do you see the themes of creation, the fall, Jesus' birth, the atoning sacrifice He made for us on the cross, and reference to Jesus' second coming?
2. Read Isaiah 64:1-9. The season of Advent is more than just an extended celebration of Christmas; it is a season of preparation. In this passage from Isaiah, the people are crying out in repentance, asking for mercy. How does repentance help us prepare for Christ's coming? Have you had an experience where repentance led to greater peace?
3. Read Psalm 80:1-7 and 17-19. This psalm is a community lament reflecting a situation where some of the tribes have received harsh treatment from Gentile neighbors. Their plea to God is repeated in Verses 3, 7, and 19. How does this refrain speak to the need for a Savior both in historical times and yet today?
4. Peace is the theme of this first Sunday in Advent, and 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 begins with this greeting, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." As the reading continues, Paul writes about unity. How specifically does Paul speak of unity in this reading, and how have you seen unity lead to peace in the church?
5. The Gospel reading for the first Sunday in Advent is Mark 13:24-37. In this passage, how does Jesus encourage us to live as we wait for his second coming? What imagery does He use?

LESSON 2 Week of December 6, 2020
“COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS” (Charles Wesley)

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

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

Charles Wesley wrote 7,500 hymns, roughly a hymn every other day for 50 years! “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” looks forward to Jesus’ Second Coming even as it recognizes our freedom from sinfulness through his death on the cross. It begins, “Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free.” Wesley looked forward to the time when Jesus will come again to set us free from fear and sin. When Wesley was about 30 years old, he traveled to America and witnessed slavery firsthand. Soon after, he returned to England. Wesley was criticized for not remaining in America to join the fight against slavery, but his weapons were his sermons and his hymns. For the next several decades, his sermons and hymns lent their power to the efforts to make people free: from slavery, fear, and sin.

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” certainly ties into the season of life we are in where “release from fear” is a very real hope for many people in today’s world. The second verse reminds us that Christ’s new dwelling is within the human heart, therefore, the fullness of that dwelling is in people gathered. This gives us hope during these times when we cannot meet in person in a building, as Christ’s reign transcends that, even as we enact worship in a physically divided, yet equally spiritually connected community. We are reminded of the early Christian church, where believers did not care about geographical meeting places but met in homes.

The hymn is set to two different tunes. The most well-known tune is titled “HYFRYDOL,” which means tuneful or pleasant. This tune was composed by the Welsh composer Roland H. Pritchard in 1830 when he was 19. Pritchard was well known as a “cantor,” or “song leader” in modern day terms. HYFRYDOL was first published in Pritchard’s collection of music for children in 1844. The entire melody, with the exception of one note, consists only of the first five notes of a major scale. This makes the hymn easy to sing and showcases the gracefulness of the melody; it goes up, down, changes direction, then repeats a note.

Scriptures: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Advent Theme: Hope

As you begin the week’s study, consider these questions and share with your group as you are comfortable doing so.

- Can you remember “hoping” for some special Christmas gift as a child? What was the gift, and did you receive it?
- What is your hope this Christmas season?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 2 – COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS

1. “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus is Christological hymn in that it tells us much about who Jesus is and what He does. List below what the hymn tells us about Jesus. What specific Bible passages does the hymn make you think about?

As this study goes to print, we are living with a “stay-at-home advisory” because positive Corona Virus cases are increasing. We have more time at home than ever to slow down and find our “rest in Thee” as the hymn says in the second line. Where are you finding Sabbath time and rest these days?

2. Read Isaiah 40:1-11. This chapter in Isaiah presents a turning point in the prophet’s writing, one where his tone turns from confrontation to assurance. Where do you find the theme of hope in this passage?
3. In Psalm 85, the people are asking forgiveness on behalf of the whole people, asking God to show His steadfast love and faithfulness. Read Verses 1-2 and 8-13. Where do you “see” Jesus in this psalm?
4. Read 2 Peter 3:8-15a. What does this passage tell us about the Second Coming? How does Peter encourage us to live in the days where we wait for Jesus to come again?
5. The Gospel of Mark does not begin with a birth story as Matthew and Luke do, but instead begins with good news, the “Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Mark begins with the story of John the Baptist. Read Mark 1:1-8. Where do you see a link between Old Testament prophesy and the story of John the Baptist? What do we learn about John that can help us prepare the way for Jesus to enter the lives of other people as we share the Gospel story?

LESSON 3 Week of December 13, 2020
“HOW GREAT OUR JOY!”

While by the sheep we watched at night,
Glad tidings brought an angel bright.

Refrain: How great our joy! Great our joy!
Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!

There shall be born, so He did say,
In Bethlehem a Child today. Refrain:

There shall the Child lie in a stall,
This Child who shall redeem us all. Refrain:

This gift of God we'll cherish well,
That ever joy our hearts shall fill. Refrain:

The origin of the text for “How Great Our Joy” is not known, but it may date back to as early as 1500 AD in Germany. In 1623, the tune was modernized and given an echo setting, where one group or individual repeats the lines of another. There is speculation that the song may have been designed for a Christmas play in which the shepherds' lines were followed by an off-stage echo. There were originally 9 stanzas, but today only the four above are sung. The first two stanzas of the song were translated by American born Theodore Baker (1851-1934) who studied music in Germany, and the tune is based on an arrangement by Hugo Jüngst (1853-1923).

Verse 3 reminds us of the amazing story of Jesus, that He goes from a child sleeping in a stall to the universal implications of his ministry and purpose in coming to earth, to redeem us all.

Scriptures: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; Luke 1:46b-55

Advent Theme: Joy

As you begin the week's study, consider these questions and share with your group as you are comfortable doing so.

- What brings you joy in the Christmas season?
- How do you show your joy in Christ's coming?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 3 – HOW GREAT OUR JOY!

1. “How Great Our Joy” illustrates Luke 2:8-20. Read this scripture passage and consider joy from the perspective of the angels and the shepherds. How do they show their joy in the coming of the Christ child?
2. Read Isaiah 61:1-4 and 8-11. As an Advent text, this passage describes what the Messiah will do. Identify those things in Verses 1-4 and discuss how Jesus fulfilled this prophesy.
3. Psalm 126 is a song of joy, remembering with joy past events of mercy as encouragement for the present. What words or phrases are repeated in this passage and how are they encouraging?
4. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24, Paul gives several commands to the people in Thessalonica. What are they? Which of these do you struggle with and why is it hard for you?
5. Read Luke 1:46b-55. Known as The Magnificat, this passage is Mary’s hymn of praise, sung when she visited Elizabeth and Jesus leapt in her womb. Mary describes what her son’s birth means to believers; identify these things and share one that is especially personal to you. Name the wonderful things Mary says about God in this song of praise.

LESSON 4 Week of December 20, 2020
“ANGELS FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY” (James Montgomery)

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story now proclaim Messiah's birth.

Refrain: Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn King.

Shepherds, in the field abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing; yonder shines the infant light. Refrain

Sages, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations; ye have seen His natal star. Refrain

Saints, before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear;
Suddenly the Lord, descending, in His temple shall appear. Refrain

Sinners, wrung with true repentance, doomed for guilt to endless pains,
Justice now revokes the sentence, mercy calls you; break your chains. Refrain

Though an Infant now we view Him, He shall fill His Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to Him; every knee shall then bow down. Refrain

All creation, join in praising God, the Father, Spirit, Son,
Evermore your voices raising to th'eternal Three in One. Refrain

This hymn was written by James Montgomery (1771-1854), who was born in Scotland of Irish parents. His father, John Montgomery, was a Moravian pastor—apparently the only Moravian pastor serving in Scotland at the time. Montgomery's parents felt a call to serve as missionaries on the island of Barbados. When James was only five years old, they departed for the West Indies, leaving James with a Moravian group in County Antrim, Ireland. His parents died in the West Indies a few years later, so James never saw them again. As a young man, Montgomery drifted from the faith, but as he matured, he returned to the Moravian church and became an advocate for Christian missions. On Christmas Eve, 1816, Montgomery was reading the Bible and Luke 2:13-14 captured his attention. He was inspired and quickly wrote this hymn.

Verse 3 references the magi or “sages” who traveled to see Jesus. This verse is a reminder that Christ himself is the true source of all wisdom and goodness. There is an old adage, “faith seeking understanding,” which calls us to go beyond the academic understanding of the nativity and remember that faith is necessary to understand how God's plan for redemption of mankind came through the birth, life and death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Advent Theme: Love

As you begin the week's study, consider these questions and share with your group as you are comfortable doing so.

- What do you love most about Christmas?
- What is your favorite way to show the love of Jesus to others?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 4 – ANGELS FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY

1. Each verse of “Angels from the Realms of Glory” speaks to the nativity from the perspective of a different group of people. Identify the group in each verse and their response to Jesus’s birth.

Verse 1

Verse 2

Verse 3

Verse 4

Verse 5

Verse 6

Verse 7

2. 2 Samuel 7 is a key passage in the history of salvation. It’s considered a passage of Messianic promise. Read 2 Samuel 7:1-11 and Verse 16. How is that promise conveyed in these verses?
3. Psalm 89 is directly related to the reading from 2 Samuel. In 2 Samuel 7, Verses 8-17 are considered the Davidic Covenant, even though the word “covenant” does not appear in the passage. The covenant is found in 2 Samuel 7:16 as the Lord speaks through the prophet Nathan and says, “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” Read Psalm 89:1-4 and 19-26. What words are repeated in these verses that help us to understand what this covenant is based upon?
4. Paul’s very detailed and theological letter to the Romans concludes in Romans 16:25-27 with a doxology, an expression of praise to God. In these verses, why is Paul praising God?
5. Luke 1:26-38, the birth of Jesus is foretold to Mary by the angel Gabriel. The Advent theme of this Sunday is love. How is love shown throughout this passage to Mary, Elizabeth, and to God? Which of these things speaks to you personally?

LESSON 5 December 24, 2020 – Christmas Eve
“O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM” (Phillips Brooks)

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in the dark street shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and fathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God, the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell:
Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

Phillips Brooks was a great 19th century preacher; great in public speaking, greatly esteemed by his people, and great in size, he was six feet, six inches tall! In 1865, Brooks journeyed to the Holy Land, where he rode a horse from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. He visited the field where it is said the shepherds saw the angels, and he remained there for midnight services at the Church of the Nativity. He found the whole experience quite moving. Three years later, needing a Christmas carol for the Sunday school Christmas program, he decided to write one. Inspired by memories of Bethlehem, he wrote the words in one sitting. He handed them to his organist, Lewis Redner, asking him to put the words to music. Redner struggled for some time trying to come up with just the right melody to fit the words. Then, on the day of the program, the melody came to him in his sleep. He, too, did his writing in one short session, considering the tune a gift of God. This carol has been a favorite for nearly a century and a half. There are two melodies, one that we are familiar with and an English melody.

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

Instead of small group questions for this lesson, spend time reflecting on the scriptures above and the words of “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” If possible, listen to the two versions of the melody. May your reflection of that first Christmas Eve move you, even as it moved Phillips Brooks many years ago.

LESSON 6 Week of December 27, 2020
“LO, HOW A ROSE E’ER BLOOMING”
15th Century German Carol translated by Theodore Baker

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

Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind;
Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright, she bore to us a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

The shepherds heard the story proclaimed by angels bright,
How Christ, the Lord of glory was born on earth this night.
To Bethlehem they sped and in the manger they found Him,
As angel heralds said.

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

“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” was originally written with just the first two verses, which express the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, foretelling the birth of Jesus. It emphasizes the royal genealogy of Jesus and Christian messianic prophecies. The first verse describes a rose sprouting from the stem of the Tree of Jesse, a symbolic illustration of Jesus’s lineage from Jesse of Bethlehem, the father of King David. The image was especially popular in medieval times and it is featured in many works of religious art from the period. It has its origin in the Book of Isaiah: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots (Isaiah 11:1).” The second verse of the hymn, written in the first person, then explains to the listener the meaning of this symbolism: that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the rose that has sprung up to bring forth a child. This verse affirms the doctrine of the Virgin birth of Jesus. Since the 19th century other verses have been added.

The reference to a rose appears in The Song of Solomon, Chapter 2 Verses 1-3. This book can be read as an allegory, namely, as an extended picture of the love between Israel’s God and His people, then between Christ and his Bride, the church.

Scriptures: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

As you begin the week’s study, consider these questions and share with your group as you are comfortable doing so.

- What or who blessed you in this Christmas season?
- Although Christmas looked very different this year during the pandemic, were you able to find a way to be a blessing to others? If so, how?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 6 – LO, HOW A ROSE E’ER BLOOMING

1. Verse 4 of “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” reminds us that the rose has a sweet fragrance. Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. The Apostle Paul uses the words “fragrance” and “aroma” in this passage to illustrate how Christians can spread the knowledge of Christ. Discuss Verse 4 in light of this scripture passage, how are they related?
2. Read Isaiah 61:10-62:3. How does this prophetic passage reflect:
 - the birth of Jesus
 - salvation
 - witness
 - new life in Christ
3. Psalm 148 is a doxology, a hymn of praise that calls on all of God’s creation to praise Him. Read the psalm aloud then through again and list below all who are told to praise the Lord in the psalm.

What reasons does the psalmist give for why all should praise the Lord?
4. Read Galatians 4:4-7. How does this passage relate to the birth story of Jesus? What does it mean to you personally to be God’s child, his heir?
5. In Luke 2:22-40, we meet Anna and Simeon, two older adults who were “waiting” for the Christ child. Read this passage and compare Simeon and Anna. What did they have in common, and how were they different? What was their response to encountering Jesus? As we have once again come through an Advent season, how do Anna and Simeon encourage us as we wait for Jesus’s second coming?

LESSON 7 Week of January 6, 2021
“AS WITH GLADNESS MEN OF OLD” (William C. Dix)

As with gladness men of old, did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to Thee.

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

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

Holy Jesus, every day, keep us in the narrow way;
And, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide, where no clouds Thy glory hide.

“As with Gladness Men of Old” is an Epiphany hymn. William Chatterton Dix wrote the hymn on January 6, 1859 while recovering from an extended illness. He was bed bound at his home in Glasgow, Scotland and unable to attend that morning's Epiphany service at church. While reading the account of the Wise Men in the Gospel of Matthew, he was inspired by the text. He began to write his thoughts throughout the day. His writings eventually became this hymn. However, he kept it private until the following year, when it was published in *Hymns for Public Worship and Private Devotion*. “As with Gladness Men of Old” is the only well-known Epiphany hymn or carol about the Biblical magi that avoids referring to them as either “magi” or “kings” and does not state how many there were. The hymn reminds us not to focus on the value of the gift, but the value of giving and adoration of Jesus Christ.

Scriptures: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12, Matthew 2:1-12

As you begin the week's study, consider these questions and share with your group as you are comfortable doing so.

- If you were a magi coming to see the Christ child, what gift would you bring?
- How are you able to use your spiritual gifts in this pandemic season?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 7 – AS WITH GLADNESS MEN OF OLD

1. “As with Gladness Men of Old” reminds us not to focus on the value of the gift, but the value of giving and adoration of Jesus Christ. How does each verse of the hymn relate to giving and adoration?
2. In Isaiah 60:1-6, the prophet sees the final glory of God’s people, uniting all humanity in knowing the true God. We call the celebration of the coming of the Magi to see the Christ child “Epiphany.” An epiphany is defined as "an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being, a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something, an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking, an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure, or a revealing scene or moment." How does Isaiah 60:1-6 fit this definition of epiphany?
3. Psalm 72 anticipates a worldwide rule that embraces in full what the Messiah will accomplish. It is an appropriate psalm for Epiphany, which recognizes the coming of the Magi as the first visit of Gentiles to Christ. What do Verses 1-7 of Psalm 72 tell us about the attributes of God? What does it tell us the Messiah will do?
4. In Ephesians 3:1-12, the Apostle Paul explains his call and ministry to the Gentiles. Paul had his own “epiphany” as defined in question 2 above, when Christ was revealed to him on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9). As you read Ephesians 3:1-12, what in Paul’s experience is helpful to us in our own witness to unbelievers?
5. Our final Gospel reading in this sermon/study series is the story of the coming of the Magi, Matthew 2:1-12. What does this story teach us about spreading the gospel message?

24 ADVENT/CHRISTMAS/EPIPHANY ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

1. How many words can you make from the letters in “Advent is the coming of Christ”?
2. On the first day of Advent, take a calendar and plan some special way each day to recognize one of the themes of Advent: peace, hope, joy and love.
3. Collect 24 nativity pieces, in addition to those in your nativity set, add small gifts, animal figures or stuffed animals. Place them all in a basket and add a piece each day, beginning with December 1. Save the Christ child to add on December 24.
4. Plan a soup week. Have a simple soup and bread each night for dinner and donate what you would have spent on dinners to a charity.
5. Create a Psalm bag, said to be a German tradition where numbers 1 to 150 are written on pieces of paper and placed in a bag. Each day before dinner, take turns selecting a number from the bag and then read the numbered Psalm before the meal.
6. Create a Jesse tree. Find a dead tree branch, secure it in a pot or stand, and create ornaments from Old Testament stories leading up to the birth of Jesus (search the internet on “Jesse tree ornaments”, some sites provide free printable ornaments to color).
7. Make a Christmas chain of 24 strips of paper and remove one each day, starting December 1.
8. Write 24 favorite Bible verses on slips of paper, choose one to read each day.
9. Think of 24 people to pray for or things to pray about. Write each on a slip of paper and place them in a jar or bag. Remove one each morning to pray for throughout the day.
10. Make cookies in a wreath shape to symbolize Christ’s love that never ends.
11. Art in the dark: turn out all the lights and give each person a sheet of paper and pencil. Draw the nativity and then turn on the lights and see what your picture looks like!
12. Write parts of the Christmas story on slips of paper (like shepherds running to see Jesus or angels singing). Use them for a family game night to play charades.
13. Read part of the Christmas story from a children’s Bible each evening at bedtime.
14. Participate in a family giving activity, shop for a food pantry or toy and make the delivery.
15. Make a card or gift for someone who will be alone this Christmas.
16. Take a hike and find something in nature to include in your Christmas decorations.
17. Learn about and sing the Christmas hymns in this study.
18. Create a bird’s Christmas tree with ornaments made with birdseed.
19. Create a Christmas video and share it with family members you aren’t able to see.
20. Research your ethnic Christmas customs and make one of them part of your celebration.
21. On Christmas Eve, thaw frozen bread dough and create a wreath symbolizing God’s never-ending love for us in Jesus. Eat the bread for Christmas dinner.
22. On the 12 days after Christmas, bless someone who is lonely secretly with a small gift.
23. Wrap a gift for each family member in gold paper and open them on Epiphany to symbolize the giving of gifts to Jesus by the Magi.
24. Read *The Story of the Fourth Wiseman* by Henry Van Dyke and talk about what gift you would bring to the Christ child.