

Christmas Eve YEAR A December 24, 2016

Christmas The Nativity of Our Lord (Night)

Any of the Christmas Day sets may be used on the evening of Christmas Eve. The set below is for use in Holy Communion.

Christmas Eve this year focuses on the seemingly ordinary theme of God's coming to us in Christ. However, the key issue in this coming, is in our capacity to see it, to recognise it, to appropriate it and to make it seen. The surprise, perhaps, of this celebration – that should keep us open-minded and open hearted, and constantly mindful and aware – is that it was the most unlikely people who got to see the birth of Christ, and the expected ones who missed it completely.

May our eyes and be opened to see again for the first time (to borrow a phrase from Marcus Borg) the power of the incarnation for us and our world.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Isaiah 9:2-7: God offers a sign of God's grace and protection to the King and people of Judah – in the darkness light shines, and the birth of child is the sign of new life and of God's righteous kingdom to be established.

Psalms 96: A song of praise for God's greatness and glory, anticipating God's coming as righteous judge.

Titus 2:11-14: Through Christ God's grace has appeared and God has enabled us to live lives of goodness.

Luke 2:1-20: Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem for the Emperor's census, and while there Mary gives birth to her son. Shepherds are told by angels about the birth and find the place where the holy family is to be found, telling the story of what they have been told about the child.

Readings http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%209:%202-7%0Acw%20Psalm%2096%0ATitus%202:%2011-14%0ALuke%202:%201-14,%2015-20

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

O God,
who madest this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of his coming,
who is the light of the world;
Grant that we who on earth hail the brightness of his appearing
may rejoice hereafter in the light of his heavenly glory;
who with thee and the Holy Spirit,
liveth and reigneth, one God, now and for ever.

Eternal God,
who made this most holy night
to shine with the brightness of your one true light:
Bring us, who have known the revelation
of that light on earth,

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to see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1 Night

God of darkness and silence, you have pierced the quiet of this night by the utterance of your Word in our flesh.

May your word of compassion and reconciliation resound in us and through us.

After each petition there may be silence followed by

God of love
grant our prayer.

God of darkness and silence, you have pierced the quiet of this night by the utterance of your Word in our flesh. May your word of compassion and reconciliation resound in us and through us.

In this holy night angels proclaimed the peace of your unconquered Sun of righteousness. Strengthen all who work for peace and justice.

In this holy night you came to us in a child cradled in a borrowed bed of straw as there was no room in the inn. Open our hearts to the needs of the homeless and the hungry.

In this holy night shepherds and outcasts heard your good news. Give us grace to spread your gospel of joy and liberation.

In this holy night we rejoice at the coming of this time of re-creation. Be with those who travel, enrich our rejoicing, and strengthen the bonds between us.

In this holy night Christians throughout the world are celebrating Christ's birth. Unite us in one family that we may shine with the one light that scatters all our darkness.

In this holy night your living Word leaped down, shedding light on all who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Give strength and peace to all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.

In this holy night heaven and earth embrace and in your true child you give us power to be your children. Fulfill in your love all who have gone before us in the faith. May we, like them, remain faithful to the mystery of the Word made flesh and live in your eternal light.

Hear these prayers we bring to you and fulfill your purposes in us in the name of Jesus, your incarnate Word. **Amen.**

- Bosco Peters

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2 Night

In joy and thanksgiving at Christ's birth,
Let us sing to the Lord a new song,

On earth peace, good will among people.

We pray for all faithful people,
For all welcome messengers of good news,

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For the nations and their rulers,
For the corporations and their executives,
For anyone with power over the lives of others,

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For those who defend the helpless,
For those who strive for justice,
For those who work to find a way to peace,
For all the world, and all who live in it,

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For anyone suffering, sick, alone, afraid, or in any kind of trouble.
We pray especially for ... *[name those you want to remember today]*.

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For our own community, for friends, neighbors, and family, near and far.
We pray especially for ... *[name those you want to remember today]*.

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

For those who have died.
We pray especially for ... *[name those you want to remember today]* .

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

We offer thanksgiving for Mary's firstborn Son—
good news of great joy.

Let us sing to the Lord a new song,
On earth peace, good will among people.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
Before the eyes of all the nations you sent your Son,
the exact imprint of love itself, to be our salvation.
With the shepherds in the fields,
let us go now to Bethlehem,
there to find Christ in our hearts, and in the world. **Amen.**

~ written by Margaret D. McGee for the Christmas Eve service at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Port Townsend, Washington.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

3 Night

Presider or deacon

As we join the angels and celebrate with joy the birth of the Son of God, let us offer prayers to God who gives new birth to sons and daughters in every place.

Deacon or other leader

By the birth of the timeless Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For *N* our bishop and the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all believers who put their trust in the incarnate Son of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority, and for peace and justice.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the conversion of the whole human race to our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, for those in prison, and for the dying and the dead.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Remembering *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Source of light and gladness, accept the prayers we offer on this joyful feast. May we grow in Jesus Christ who unites our lives to yours and who is Lord for all eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

4 Night

Each petition concludes:

P With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P In mercy, O God, You gave Your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. Help us to rejoice in this indescribable gift, giving constant thanks for Your Son, the incarnate Christ, who by His life, death, and resurrection appeases Your wrath for our sins. With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P In mercy, O God, You descended from heaven, desiring that all sinners would repent, believe in You, and know life everlasting. For the sake of Your only begotten Son, hear our prayers for those outside the church. Use us as messengers of Your Gospel that by Your Word unbelievers would come to know and confess Your holy name. With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P In mercy, O God, You order and preserve all things. We beseech You, good Lord, to safeguard our land from discord and strife. Grant us national prosperity and protection according to Your will. Direct government leaders to serve all citizens with honesty and uprightness. Abide with all emergency workers, protecting them from harm and imminent danger. Give fortitude to all military personnel and their families, strengthening them up with Your grace and comfort this Christmastide. With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P In mercy, O God, You took up our frail flesh and bones. Be steadfast with the elderly. As infirmities increase, so also intensify Your acts of mercy for their care. Remove doubt and unbelief from their hearts. Give assurance of your constant presence to the lonely. Lead them to the know and confess that You alone are Immanuel—God with us to the end of all the ages. With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P In mercy, O God, You manifested Yourself among us. By Your flesh and blood, in and under the bread and wine, You grant forgiveness, life, and salvation. Keep all who partake of this Holy Sacrament in the one true faith that we they may live in You even as You live in us. With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P In mercy, O God, You came to rescue us from the threatening perils of our sins. Grant us a blessed Christmastide as we rejoice in Your nativity gift of eternal rescue. As we commemorate Your birth keep us mindful of the new Jerusalem—the place where all Your saints unite, and where true joy shall be found. With Mary,

C let us ponder all that God has done.

P Hear us, O God, for the sake of Your only begotten Son—the Word made flesh—very God of very God, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

2

Listen to our prayers, O God, as we proclaim the riches of your glorious inheritance and the immeasurable greatness of your power for us who believe, saying, Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with a cry of joy.

O Gracious God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give to your Church a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know you, that we may be your witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Clap your hands, all you peoples;

shout to God with a cry of joy.

You reign over the nations, Almighty One, and the rulers of the earth belong to you: Put your power to work among those who hold authority throughout the world, that they may establish your peace and reconciliation among all people.

Clap your hands, all you peoples;

shout to God with a cry of joy.

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Cover the earth with your grace, O Compassionate One, that all who suffer from any threat or oppression may know the power of your goodness.

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with a cry of joy.

Fill our community with your blessing, O Loving One, that with the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know the hope to which you have called us.

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with a cry of joy.

Receive our prayers, dear God, for all for whom we are called to pray, especially ____.
Hear our song of praise and thanksgiving as we lift our gratefulness to you, especially for ____.

You raised Christ from the dead and seated him at your right hand:Â Receive into your divine dwelling those who have died, especially ____.

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with a cry of joy.

Presider: Almighty and Everliving One, your Christ reigns far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named: Put all things under Christ's feet and fill the earth with the fullness of him who fills all in all, through the power of your Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

POST COMMUNION

God our Father,
in this night you have made known to us again
the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:
Confirm our faith and fix our eyes on him
until the day dawns
and Christ the Morning Star rises in our hearts.
To him be glory both now and for ever.

PRAYERS

O Holy One,
heavenly angels spoke to earthly shepherds
and eternity entered time in the child of Bethlehem.
Through the telling of the Christmas story,
let our temporal lives be caught up in the eternal
in that same child,
that we might join shepherds and all the heavenly host
in praising the coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

God of glory,
your splendour shines from a manger in Bethlehem,
where the Light of the world is humbly born
into the darkness of human night.
Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world,
so that we, like him, may become beacons of your justice,
and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.

Light of life, you came in flesh,
born into human pain and joy,
and gave us power to be your children.
Grant us faith, O Christ, to see your presence among us,
so that all of creation may sing new songs of gladness
and walk in the way of peace. Amen.

We bless you, Abba, Father,
for you have visited your people
in one like us in all things but sin,
and in human fragility you have revealed
the face of divinity.
Gather into your arms
all the peoples of the world,
so that in your embrace
we may find blessing, peace,
and the fullness of our inheritance
as your daughters and sons. Amen.

With the angels of heaven we proclaim your glory, O God.
As the radiance of your presence lights up the heavens,
we pray for enlightenment
for your church on behalf of the whole world.
Grant that, through our prayers,
our lives may radiate the presence of Christ
to all who dwell on earth,
for he is our Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

God of all ages,
in the birth of Christ
your boundless love for your people
shattered the power of darkness.
Be born in us with that same love and light,
that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God of love, Father of all,
the darkness that covered the earth
has given way to the bright dawn of your Word made flesh.
Make us a people of this light.
Make us faithful to your Word
that we may bring your life to the waiting world.
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.
International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)

O God, you make us glad
by the yearly festival
of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ:
Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer,
may with sure confidence
behold him when he comes to be our Judge;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
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one God, now and for ever. Amen.
1979 Book of Common Prayer

Eternal Word,
you became flesh
and dwelt among us,
because of your great love for mankind.
Though you were God,
you humbled yourself
out of love for your creation,
being born in a lowly dwelling,
to a meek and chaste Virgin.
Give us your grace,
to practice humility,
following your example,
and the example
of your servant and Mother,
the Blessed Virgin Mary. Amen
David Bennett

Almighty God and Father of light,
a child is born to us and a Son is given to us.
Your eternal Word leaped down from heaven
in the silent watches of the night,
and now your Church is filled with wonder
at the nearness of her God.
Open our hearts to receive His life
and increase our vision with the rising of dawn,
that our lives may be filled with His glory and His peace,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL)

Almighty God,
who has poured upon us the new light of your Incarnate Word;
grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts
may shine forth in our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Grant that, through our prayers,
our lives may radiate the presence of Christ
to all who dwell on earth,
for he is our Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

God of all ages,
in the birth of Christ
your boundless love for your people
shattered the power of darkness.
Be born in us with that same love and light,
that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Isaiah 9:2-7:

This text is particularly meaningful in the midst of December in this part of the world, with the short days and sometimes seemingly perpetual darkness. It can be overwhelming. Our life without God's light is like a perpetual darkness. But the joy of Christmas is the coming of the light in the Christ-child.

The coming of the messiah comes as one who frees from oppression and lifts the burden from the downtrodden. Christmas comes to those in desperate need - sometimes we forget that, and think of Christmas as all for us and about us who can't honestly describe ourselves as oppressed.

"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." What is your name for the messiah? This year in my congregation, we are focusing on the appellation "Prince of Peace" in particular.

"there shall be endless peace" - what do you think Isaiah means by this? We look around and see that though Christ has come, we haven't experienced endless peace. Are we missing it? Is it yet to come? Do we have to aid in its coming, or does it happen in spite of us? What do you think?

I think we always have to be careful with light/darkness imagery to make sure we're not interjecting any racist overtones to our language. Obviously light/dark imagery is biblical and helpful in teaching, but we also have to watch out for ways talking about light as good and dark as evil can be hurtful to people of color. Just be mindful.

Psalm 96:

The first verses don't distinguish this psalm for me from many others. Praise God, tell of God's salvations. Great is the Lord, greatly to be praised.

God judges with equity - as a judge is supposed to do. But so often we experience injustice even in the very justice system. God's justice is always - just!

Vs. 11 is some of the anthropomorphic language often found in Psalms, but I find it effective. Heaven, earth, sea, fields, and all that is in earth is glad for God's ruler-ship. The trees sing. To my mind come images from The Lord of the Rings or The Chronicles of Narnia with trees who could indeed sing praise.

We will be judged with God's truth. How do you understand that? With what else are we judged?

Titus 2:11-14:

Christmas Eve is the only time Titus appears in the lectionary, and I'm guessing people usually don't use the Titus text when we have so much to talk about in Isaiah and Luke. Poor Titus! But there's some good stuff in this short selection.

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"The grace of God has appeared." - I really like this - Grace, something we think of as intangible and invisible, has become tangible, literally touchable, certainly visible, in the coming of the Christ child.

"bringing salvation to all" - emphasis mine. Salvation is for all.

"renounce impiety and worldly passions" - what are the 'worldly passions' you need to announce. Instead of a season of joy and abundance, it seems we often make the season instead one of gluttony and selfishness. But here we are called to live lives that are "self-controlled, upright, and godly." What would you have to change to make that true for yourself?

"zealous for good deeds" - I can try and trick myself all I want, but I know I can't honestly describe myself as one who is zealous for good deeds. Can you? I wish I could though - what a great description for someone.

Luke 2:1-20:

I find it hard to write notes on this text and give a new look at words so familiar. But we have to look with new eyes and read with new ears, don't we? I find it hard to even preach on this text. Often on Christmas Eve I opt for monologues and drama, to try and let the story come alive. My goal is to try to engage the text in a five-senses sort of way: what do we see, hear, smell, touch, taste? And additionally: what is everyone feeling?

Mary, of course, is the star here (aside from the baby, obviously.) What does Mary feel? Is she stressed? Exasperated? Scared out of her mind? We don't know the details, but from the story we can't see that there's anyone there to help her through the birthing process except Joseph.

Why do you think God speaks to the shepherds? We have such warm fuzzy images of shepherds, but we don't really have a feel for the places of shepherd's in Jesus' day. Why are they included in the birth? Why not the innkeeper? A priest? Other townsfolk? What do you think the shepherds felt about what they saw (other than terror at the angels?!)

The shepherds told others about the baby Jesus. I wonder what was made of this news - crazy shepherds? Did years later people still wonder about the child? Know that the man Jesus was the baby they'd once heard about?

"Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart." One of my favorite verses in the bible. What a brave, faithful young woman we find pictured in this text.

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The message for Christmas Eve is clear and simple: in Christ, God comes to us. There are so many ways this can be – and has been – understood: God's presence is not far off, but close and accessible; those who are first involved in this coming are poor and excluded people – shepherds, women, and foreigners – which demonstrates God's commitment to justice. But, perhaps at the heart of all this is the question of seeing. Isaiah calls Ahaz to 'see' God's work – God's light shining in the darkness – on behalf of God's people. The

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Psalmist invites all the earth and all peoples to see God's glory and majesty, to recognise God's coming in justice and righteousness and to respond in praise; Paul encourages followers of Christ to see God's grace that has come, and to live it out as we watch for the coming of God's reign in fullness; The shepherds are invited to see the Christ child, and in this event, see God's coming to them and to all humanity. If God comes, but we are not open to the visitation, if we have closed eyes and hearts, the coming can do nothing for us. However, when we allow our eyes to be opened, we discover God's coming in every moment and place.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: A significant part of the work of justice is a commitment to seeing – as clearly and truly as possible – both the realities of our world, and the injustices in it, and the signs of change, progress and God's reign that are emerging. It is only with this seeing that we can encourage, support and strengthen the good that is happening and effectively challenge the darkness. So, in the growing concern about climate change and our dependence on non-renewable sources of energy, there is a light shining in the darkness. In the growing groups within faith communities of those who seek inter-faith dialogue and understanding rather than conflict and dominance, there is a sign of God's coming. In the rise of social entrepreneurship, we see God's grace at work in our world. In the growth of fair trade movements, ethical consumerism, and sustainable and humane farming, there is light in our world. All of these are signs of God's coming – the influence and growth of God's reign – among us. Each offers us the opportunity to cooperate with what God is doing in our world. And each also offers the challenge to continue to assess our lives against Christ's standard, and to change to embody the Gospel where necessary.

LOCAL APPLICATION: God's coming into our world, miraculously, is not just to communities, nations and the whole earth, but also to individuals. In each of our lives we have the opportunity to see God's coming, and we have the responsibility to acknowledge the places where we have resisted or ignored God's desire to enter our lives. Where we find ourselves growing more aware of God's presence and purpose in our daily routines, where we discover new capacities for compassion, humility, simplicity and joy, where we find ourselves becoming more whole in spite of the struggles of living in this world, we have seen God's coming to us. Where we remain stuck in destructive attitudes and habits, where we continue to allow our selfishness and fear to break down relationships, where we fail to allow our eyes to be opened to God's image in others, we have failed to welcome the Christ Child into our lives. Ultimately, what the incarnation tells us, dramatically and powerfully, is that Christ came not just to get us into heaven, but to bring heaven to this earth. To the extent that our lives reflect this heaven – to the extent that we become more Christ-like and just in our own daily lives – we are the blessed ones to whom God has, once again, come.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

[Wrecking Church](http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2015/12/09/wrecking-church-christmas-eve-c-2015/), Anjel Scarborough, [People of the Incarnation](#), Susan Butterworth, *Sermons That Work*
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2015/12/09/wrecking-church-christmas-eve-c-2015/>

["Making Room,"](http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-eve-abc-2013/) the Rev. Canon Frank S. Logue, *Sermons that Work*, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-eve-abc-2013/>

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["Did You Find What You Were Looking For?"](http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-day-abc-2013/) the Rev Anjel Scarborough, *Sermons that Work*, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2013/12/09/christmas-day-abc-2013/>

["Look to the Child,"](http://day1.org/3362-look-to-the-child) Rev. John Philip Newell, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/3362-look-to-the-child>

["Luminarias,"](http://day1.org/1022-luminarias) the Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/1022-luminarias>

["Sermon for Christmas Day,"](http://day1.org/970-sermon-for-christmas-day) Bishop Steven Charleston, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/970-sermon-for-christmas-day>

[Christmas Sermons,](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/christmas.htm) Pastor Edward F. Marquart, Grace Lutheran Church, Seattle
<http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/christmas.htm>

CHILDREN

[Highlighting the Chrismon Tree 2014,](https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2014/11/16/advent2014/) Fran Woodruff, *On the Chancel Steps*.
<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2014/11/16/advent2014/>

[Worshiping with Children,](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-christmas-eve-or-day-december-24.html) Christmas Eve/Day, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-christmas-eve-or-day-december-24.html>

[Why Children Need to Get To Church on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/why-children-need-to-get-to-church-on.html)
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/why-children-need-to-get-to-church-on.html>

[Stories about Christmas Celebrations and Themes,](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/christmas-stories-for-worship.html) Carolyn C. Brown, *Worshiping with Children*
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/christmas-stories-for-worship.html>

[On the Chancel Steps,](https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/advent/) children's resources by Frances Woodruff
<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/advent/>

[Christmas Childrens Sermons,](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/christmas.htm) the Rev. Edward Markquart, *Sermons from Seattle*.
<http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/christmas.htm>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

[Joy To The World](#)
[O Come, O Come Immanuel](#)
[O Little Town Of Bethlehem](#)
[Do You Hear What I Hear?](#) (*YouTube video*)
[Emmanuel \(Hallowed Manger Ground\)](#)
[A King Is Born](#) (*YouTube video*)
[Born In Bethlehem](#)
[Welcome To Our World](#) (*YouTube video*)
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See also - [Hymn Suggestions at Oremus Hymnal](#) - scroll down Year A
<http://oremus.org/hymnal/>

Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to churchnewsireland@gmail.com with the message Passwords in the title