

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

MATTHEW 5:16

Sponsored by Lutheran Hour Ministries and based on the
2007 International Convention Theme: "Let Your Light Shine"

Lutheran Hour Ministries
660 Mason Ridge Center Drive
St. Louis, MO 63141-8557
1-800-876-9880
www.lhm.org



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People Of Christ With A Message Of Hope

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Chaplain Doug Nicely wrote these Bible studies from Memorial Hospital, Belleville, Illinois. Before coming to Memorial in 2000, he served as pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church, Fairview Heights, Illinois, for 22 years. He has also written, produced, and spoken on devotional programs for KFYO Radio in St. Louis since 1973. He and his wife Vicki live in Mascoutah, Illinois. His stepchildren Brian (Renee') Brasher and Kristi Brasher are both parochial school teachers. Vicki and Doug are the grandparents of Avery Brasher.

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An Introduction to These Lessons

Even though words from the lips of Jesus, the theme for the 2007 Int'l Lutheran LLL Convention in Duluth – *“Let Your Light Shine”* – sounds like words to an old, familiar song. When many of us were children, we used to sing the song, *“This Little Gospel Light of Mine,”* at Sunday school, Vacation Bible School, or when we went camping with our youth groups. This song still brings warm memories to mind. Songs have a way of doing this. Or, as Martin Luther once taught, *“He who sings prays twice.”*

The best songs take us much further than warm memories. These songs also take us back again to God's Word where we can learn what we need to hear, regardless of how that teaching makes us think or feel. Ultimately, such teaching leads us back again and again to our Savior Jesus Christ, because God's Word is written to bear witness to Him.

So, this is what we are attempting to do in these lessons: to sing, to hear God's Word, and to finally be led to Jesus, the author of our salvation. We'll start each lesson with a song – like *“This Little Gospel Light of Mine”* – and then see where it all leads us.

Lessons

Lesson 1	<i>“This Little Gospel Light of Mine”</i>
Lesson 2	<i>“I Saw the Light”</i>
Lesson 3	<i>“Jesus in the Morning”</i>
Lesson 4	<i>“Lord of our Life and God of our Salvation”</i>
Lesson 5	<i>“O Little Town of Bethlehem”</i>
Lesson 6	<i>“Hark, the Herald Angels Sing”</i>
Lesson 7	<i>“As With Gladness, Men of Old”</i>
Lesson 8	<i>“Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”</i>
Lesson 9	<i>“Thine Is the Glory”</i>
Lesson 10	<i>“Holy Spirit, Light Divine”</i>
Lesson 11	<i>“Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying”</i>
Lesson 12	<i>“Abide With Me”</i>

As always, these lessons come to you in two packets. One is the Student Bible Study Guide, and the other is the Leader's Bible Study Guide. Each lesson is designed to be covered in approximately one hour. However, the degree of discussion may shorten or lengthen that time.

This study has been designed for use in small groups, led by someone from within the group. Spiritual growth and increased knowledge will take place through discussion and Bible study. The leader may be the same person throughout the study, or the leadership role may be shared within the group. Whomever the leader, it is important that the leader be an attentive listener, ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to share.

We encourage the leader to consider the following before leading the session:

- DO choose the lesson most appropriate for your particular situation.
- DO NOT assume that you need to go through the lessons in any particular order.
- DO assign the lessons in advance. Participants will be better served if prepared.
- DO print out the scriptural references. Doing so will save time.
- DO NOT force anyone to read out loud. Ask for volunteers.
- PLEASE DO NOT merely read the material word for word. These lessons are intended to guide your discussions.
- If your group is pressed for time, PLEASE DO GIVE OUT the Leader's Guide. By doing this you will facilitate discussion more quickly.

Although each lesson has a different theme, they all share a common format. They are: Opening and Prayer; Bible-based discussion; Closing Prayer.

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St. Louis, MO 63141-8557
1-800-944-3450
www.lhm.org

Lesson 1: “This Little Gospel Light of Mine”

OPENING: Going camping with a church group had its share of both strange and wonderful moments. There were the times when we went canoeing and someone’s boat tipped over! It was funny to watch others having this wet and wild accident happen to them; but not so funny (at least at first) when it happened to us. At night, there were the campfires where we would put hot dogs and marshmallows on sticks. We would join in a circle, singing “Kum Ba Yah” or “This Little Gospel Light of Mine.” Then we’d go to sleep in tents under the cover of sleeping bags, listening to the strange sounds of the night, far away from ambulances and crowded parking lots. But what were we singing about when we sang, “This little Gospel light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine”?

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, You teach us much in the Sermon on the Mount about letting our light shine. Ready us, we pray, as in those days when we were learning everything anew, to be like little children once more, so we can hear without all of the distractions that would block us from listening to what You would have us learn; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Messiah, who gives us the very words of life. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

“Let It Shine, All the Time”

1. Read Matthew 5:14-16. Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world. What does He say about us in verse 14?

(He tells us that we are a city set on a hill. Biblical people believed that the higher the hill, the closer one was to God. Jerusalem was built atop a high hill – see Psalm 121.)

2. What are some characteristics of a city that the entire world can see?

(They are strong – Proverbs 18:10. What is done in them is more noticeable – Matthew 7:24-27. They are noticed all the time – Matthew 5:43-47.)

3. Jesus changes what He says about us in verse 15, this time giving us the line in the song, “Hide it under a bushel, NO! I’m gonna let it shine!” What is a bushel? Do we have to explain what that is to our children and grandchildren?

(A bushel is a basket, and, yes, it would be good to explain that to children – see Matthew 11:25-26.)

4. What happens to a candle when it is hidden under a bushel?

(It is snuffed out for lack of oxygen – see Isaiah 42:1-4.)

5. What happens when our Gospel light is snuffed out?

(We become “secret agents” in God’s kingdom – see Mark 4:21-22.)

6. How can our light be snuffed out?

(We can keep quiet to avoid offending others – see Matthew 5:10-12. We can keep quiet, fearing that what we say isn’t going to be as good as what others say – see Matthew 10:16-20. We can keep quiet, because what we have to say may sound too “childish” – see Matthew 8:1-3.)

7. How can our lamp stand and give light to our entire house?

(We can teach what God says in His Word to our children and grandchildren – see 2 Timothy 1:5. We can do our work with or be neighbors to others as though they themselves were Jesus to us – see Ephesians 6 1-9.)

- What are some ways our parents or grandparents “shined” around the house?
- What can we remember about how their actions and words affected us?
- How would you apply this same technique today with your children or grandchildren?

(Answers will vary.)

8. Jesus also teaches us to do good works, not for our own glory, but for the glory of our Heavenly Father. Where can we do good works? *(When we give to the poor – see Matthew 6:1-4; When we pray– see Matthew 6:5-15; When we “give up” something for Jesus – see Matthew 6:6-17).*

“It Will Point the Way to Heaven”

At a moment of triumph, athletes have been known to point to heaven, showing that the glory for their achievement goes to God and not to themselves. In a similar way, the great composers have, for centuries, ended their compositions with the notation *Soli Deo Gloria* (to God Alone be the Glory).

But the glory doesn’t happen only in personal victory. One of the most important lessons we learn from King David, who is described in the Bible as *“a man after God’s own heart”* (1 Samuel 13:14), is that he knew who deserved the glory when he was successful (see 1 Samuel 17:47) and whom to run to when he sinned greatly (see Psalm 51). In either case, it was to God.

9. Read John 8:12. What does Jesus say about His connection to our eternal life?

(He tells us that He is the light of the world – see John 1:9-14.)

10. How does the Gospel light point us to heaven?

(When we continue in His Word and become His disciples – see John 8:31-32.)

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, we give You thanks for the little songs we learned many years ago that taught us to know and love You. May we never lose our first love! But if we do, may we never forget that, as our waiting Father, You are always ready to welcome us home; for we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, who made our return home possible when He shed His most precious blood for our atonement. Amen.

Lesson 2: “I Saw the Light”

OPENING: In 1948, country singer Hank Williams wrote the lyrics to a song that has become a Christian classic, “I Saw the Light.” For many years Williams had the reputation of being a “rounder” (a person who lived in the swirl of drinking, gambling, and women who did both). His song described a change of heart. He wrote:

Just like a blind man I wandered alone,
Worries and fears I claimed for my own.
Then like the blind man that Jesus gave back his sight,
Praise the Lord; I saw the light.

Years later one of Hank Williams’ friends stated that even though the singer may have sung about seeing the light, he never really did. Could this friend’s observation about Williams be an example of how many church members look down on others who are not? Or did Williams’ lyrics claim something about him that wasn’t true? We’ll never know the answer to these questions (at least this side of heaven), but this song can lead us into studying a familiar parable of Jesus from three different viewpoints.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, we have all heard about those who have wandered away from You and Your church. And then we hear about those who have wandered, but who then see the light. Spare us, Good Lord, from a judgmental attitude and teach us that we too are sinners saved by Your grace; for we pray in the name of Jesus, the Great Physician, who has not come to call home the righteous, but the sinners. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. Read Luke 15:1-2. What do you remember about the reputation of tax collectors and sinners?

(They were considered to be beyond salvation because of what they did.)

- Who might be included in such categories today?
- What would you think if someone in such a category showed up in church one Sunday?
- What do you think others at your church would say about them?
- If you had “seen the light,” would you feel comfortable going to a church where you didn’t know anyone?
- Would it be worse if everyone in church knew you only too well?

2. Why, do you think Jesus chose to associate with and even eat with those whom you probably would never see in church?

(He desires all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth – see 1 Timothy 2:1-6.)

3. Read Luke 15:11-17. What were some of the foolish things done by this prodigal son?
(He asked for his inheritance from his father before the father was dead. He squandered his inheritance in loose living. He tried to find work and was only successful in being hired to feed pigs. He became so hungry he was willing to eat the pig food.)

4. What one wise thing did he do?

(He saw the light – realizing that he could go home to his father.)

5. Read Luke 15:18-20. What did the prodigal son plan to do once he had seen the light?

(He planned to go home to his father. He has his prayer of repentance rehearsed for when he would see his father. He was willing to work as one of his father's hired servants.)

6. What would you expect if you were the prodigal returning home? Would you expect your homecoming to be humiliating or joyful? How would you expect your father to treat you when you came back home again? If the treatment would have been harsh, do you think it would have been deserved?

7. Read Luke 15: 20-24. If you weren't already familiar with this story, do you think the father's welcome would have surprised you?

(In his book, "The Waiting Father," Helmut Thielicke insists that the parable of the prodigal son isn't about the son at all, but about the father. It's not too hard, then, for us to see the Heavenly Father in the Waiting Father.)

8. What did this father do to show his son that he was welcomed home?

a. *(He ran out to meet his son before he arrived.);* b. *(He stopped his son's speech before it was finished.);* c. *(He put a good robe, a ring, and shoes on him.);* d. *(He had the fattened calf killed and had a party.)*

9. Is this the way your parents would have reacted to your return home from "loose living"? How is God different from us when it comes to reconciliation?

(He loves the world so much that He gave His only-begotten Son – see John 3:16-17.)

10. What does the story of the Prodigal Son teach us about God's love?

(The angels rejoice in heaven over one sinner who repents – see Luke 15: 10.)

11. John Newton's hymn, "Amazing Grace," refers to the prodigal son as the writer sings about his own story:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.)

What can the Heavenly Father's heart do to ours?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, Your grace is truly amazing! Help us to see in the parable of the prodigal son our own story of seeing Your light shine upon and exposing our own darkness; for we pray in the name of our Savior Jesus, who eats with tax collectors and sinners. Amen.

Lesson 3: “Jesus in the Morning”

OPENING: For centuries now, many Christians have followed an orderly cycle of praying every day. These daily prayer services have been known by different names. The ones I have known all of my life are named Matins, Noonday, and Vespers. The ritual can be as simple as a prayer prayed when we arise each morning, in the middle of the day, and then as we go to sleep. The idea behind daily prayer is to remember that we are living in God’s presence each morning, noon, and night. An old African-American spiritual makes it sound really simple:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the morning,
Jesus at the noontime,
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus when the sun goes down.

This study will give us some ideas about how we can live aware of God’s presence throughout our days.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, make us aware of Your presence each and every day. In the Lord’s Prayer, You teach us that there are times when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Help our daily prayers to give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the coming of Your kingdom also to us; for we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, who has taught us to pray. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. Read Psalm 118:10-20. Elsewhere in the psalms we are taught, “*weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning*”(Psalm 30:5). In Psalm 118, how does the psalmist express weeping and then anticipating joy? (List verses for each.)

Weeping:

- a. (*All nations surround me – v. 10*)
- b. (*I was pushed hard so that I was falling – v. 13*)
- c. (*The Lord has chastened me sorely – v. 18*)

Joy:

- a. (*In the name of the Lord I cut them off – v. 10*)
- b. (*But the Lord helped me – v. 13*)
- c. (*But He has not given me over to death – v. 18*)

2. And when the morning comes, there is rejoicing! List those expressions of joy also. (List the verses for these.)

Rejoicing:

- a. (*Hark glad sounds of victory! – v. 15*)
- b. (*I shall not die, but I shall live! – v. 17*)
- c. (*Open to me the gates of righteousness – v. 19*)
- d. (*This is the gate of the Lord – v. 20*)

3. The spiritual goes on to remind us: Love Him, love Him, love Him in the morning ... Love Him at the noontime ... Love Him, love Him, love Him when the sun goes down!

How can starting our day knowing we are loved by the Maker of heaven and earth give us strength to go through the day?

4. Read Matthew 6:24-34. The prayer at noonday is the most difficult to remember. We are so busy! What are some of the things noted in these verses that Jesus sees us worrying about? (List the verses.)

Worries:

- a. (*What we shall eat or drink or what we shall put on – v. 25*)
- b. (*We are anxious about our clothing – v. 28*)
- c. (*We worry about what others do – v. 31-32*)
- d. (*We worry about tomorrow – v. 34*)

5. What, then, are God's promises in the face of these worries? (List the verses.)

Promises:

- a. (*Look at the birds of the air – v. 26*)
- b. (*Consider the lilies of the field – v. 28*)
- c. (*But seek first His kingdom and righteousness – v. 33*)
- d. (*Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day – v. 34*)

NOTE: The spiritual would remind us: Serve Him, serve Him, serve Him in the morning ... Serve Him at the noontime ... Serve Him, serve Him, serve Him when the sun goes down.

6. Read Philippians 4:4-9. In the evenings we often have to fight our weariness and sleep in order to pray. Yet a peaceful sleep is also a gift of God's grace. What are the things listed by St. Paul that bring us a peaceful sleep? (List the verses.)

- a. (*Rejoicing in the Lord always– v. 4*)
- b. (*Having no anxiety about anything – v. 5*)
- c. (*God's peace will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus – v. 7*)
- d. (*Think about whatever is true, honorable, etc. – v. 8*)
- e. (*Do what we have learned and received and heard – v. 9*)

CLOSING PRAYER: This ancient evening prayer reminds us of God's peace:

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give Your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend to the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; all for Your love's sake. Amen.

Lesson 4: “Lord of our Life and God of our Salvation”

OPENING: It was the Summer of 2000. My wife, stepdaughter, and I went to Germany to celebrate the Millennium with a bus tour of the Luther sites. Apart from overnight trips to Tijuana, Mexico, and Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, I had never been out of the United States. I was looking forward to standing in front of the door at the Castle Church in Wittenburg where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on October 31, 1517. I wanted to step up to the door and put my fingers in the nail holes left behind by the Reformer’s hammer. When we got there, I did stand in front of a door that had the 95 Theses inscribed on it in bronze and I did enter this large Gothic church; but I found out that this was not the door that Martin Luther knew. It had been burned in the Thirty Years’ War (1618-48).

This study is based on a hymn written during that war by Matthaus Apelles Lowenstern. The verses describe the struggle to keep faithful to the Gospel during those days of war between different faiths. These lyrics, in turn, are based on Psalm 27.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, as we hear today about how Your Word has inspired countless writers to proclaim Your salvation and glory, help us to pray as those who have gone before us prayed; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. Read Psalm 27:1. What are the similarities and differences between this psalm and the song quoted below?

Lord of our life and God of our salvation,
Star of our night and hope of ev’ry nation;
Hear and receive Your Church’s supplication,
Lord God Almighty.

Similarities:

(They are both addressed to the Lord. They both mention God as our salvation.)

Differences:

(While the psalm is written by an individual, the hymn is written as a prayer by the people in God’s Church. The psalm is a statement while the hymn is a prayer.)

2. When is it a good time to pray for the needs of many and when is it good to pray for our individual needs?

3. Is one type of prayer better or worse than the other? *(No)*

4. Read Psalm 27:2-4. While some hymns quote the Bible more literally, others use words from the Bible to “set the stage” for what’s really on the mind of the hymn writer. How does this hymn writer quote the Bible?

See round Your ark the hungry billows curling;
See how Your foes their banners are unfurling
And with great spite their fiery darts are hurling,
O Lord, preserve us (v. 2)

Lord, be our light when worldly darkness veils us;
Lord, be our shield when earthly armor fails us;
And in the day when hell itself assails us,
Grant us Your peace, Lord! (v. 3)

5. It seems that the psalmist (King David) was fighting a war. Have you ever found yourself in a similar war (of body, mind, or spirit)? What weapons (of body, mind, or spirit) did you use to protect yourself?

6. What are some battles that our nation or the church may be fighting (in body, mind, or spirit) today? Could we pray either King David's Psalm or the prayer in this hymn about these battles?

7. Read Psalm 27:5-10. The hymn writer could well have based some of his verses on the words found in these verses. What are some themes new hymn verses could take from these verses? How could these new hymn verses give us a different picture of this psalm?

- a. *(He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble – v. 5)*
- b. *(And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies – v. 6)*
- c. *(Your face, Lord, do I seek – v. 8)*
- d. *(Turn not Your servant away in anger – v. 9)*
- e. *(For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up – v. 10)*

(These new verses could show us how we can pray to God in times of battle and destruction.)

8. Read Psalm 27:11-14. How do these psalm verses describe the peace prayed about in the hymn?

Peace in our hearts, where sinful thoughts are raging,
Peace in Your Church, our troubled souls assuaging,
Peace when the world its endless war is waging
Peace in Your heaven.

- a. *(We are taught God's Word to stand on a level path before our enemies – v. 11)*
- b. *(We can believe that we shall see the goodness of the Lord in this life – v. 13)*
- c. *(We can be strong and courageous by waiting for the Lord – v. 14)*

CLOSING PRAYER: O God our defender, give us the light of truth and wisdom, that all our hope may be fixed on You and on Your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Lesson 5: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

OPENING: In the Northern Hemisphere, the shortest day of the year (the Winter Solstice) comes just a few days before Christmas. This is not a coincidence. The theme of light overcoming the darkness is Biblical (see John 1:5) and the Bible connects this coming of the light to the coming of Christ (see John 1:14). This steady increasing of daylight after what we call “the shortest day of the year” is more noticeable the farther north we travel and the farther we remove ourselves from artificial lighting. As the month progresses, the daylight begins to overcome the darkness as the days pass Christmas. It’s this coming of the light that is celebrated in many of our Christmas carols.

This lesson takes us back to a favorite carol – Phillips Brooks’ “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”

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

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, today we pray that Your peace may rest upon each one of us. Even though it is not Christmas right now, it is the right time for us to rejoice that You chose to send Yourself to be with us to save us from our sins instead of leaving us in the futility of trying to save ourselves; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Messiah and Brother. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. What do you remember about Bethlehem?

- a. *(It was the place where Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, the son of Jacob – see Genesis 35:16-20)*
- b. *(It was where the story of Ruth took place – see Ruth 1:1)*
- c. *(It was the birthplace of King David – see 1 Samuel 17:12)*
- d. *(It was the place where the jealous King Herod killed the male children two years old and under, attempting to kill the newborn King of the Jews – see Matthew 2:16-18)*

2. Read Micah 5:2-4. What does the prophet Micah add to what we have said about Bethlehem?

- a. *(It is a town that is little among the clans of Judah – v. 2)*
- b. *(From that town will come one who is to be the ruler of Israel – v.2)*

3. So, what’s so great about being little? Why do you think Phillips Brooks wrote such beautiful words about a little town?

4. There is a legend that Philips Brooks, a pastor serving two churches in Philadelphia, took a trip to the Holy Land in December 1865. On Christmas Eve he traveled by horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. On the way, he passed by the fields where the shepherds heard the angels and then attended the five-hour Christmas Eve service at the Church of the Nativity. By Christmas 1868, Brooks was serving as pastor at Holy Trinity Church in Boston. He asked his organist and Sunday school superintendent, Lewis Redner, to write a tune for a little carol Brooks had written. In the first verse, Brooks tells us how he felt about being in Bethlehem that Christmas Eve.

Are there good memories you have about the Christmas Eves of your childhood?

5. Were there some sad times you remember – perhaps when Christmas Eve came at “the wrong time”? What would make Christmas a “wrong time” for anyone?

6. Note the last verse of Brooks’ hymn:

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;
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!

What does “Immanuel” mean? (See Matthew 1:22-23).

7. Read Luke 2:1-7. What were some of the “wrong times” parts of the first Christmas that might have come to the minds of Mary and Joseph?

8. Could the “wrong time” from the human perspective have been the “right time” for God to bring His Son into our world?

(Yes, it certainly was the right time – see Galatians 4:4-6)

9. Read Matthew 1:18-25. What are some new details Matthew gives us in his telling of the Christmas story from Joseph’s perspective?

a) *(At first he resolved to divorce her quietly – v. 19)*

b) *(The angel changed his mind – v. 20)*

c) *(The name “Jesus” means “Savior” – v. 21)*

d) *(The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled – v. 22-23)*

e) *(Joseph believed the angel – v. 24)*

f) *(Mary had a virgin birth – v. 25)*

10. An interesting detail about Joseph’s story is that he is the only adult in the Christmas story that never says a word! Can this tell us something important about what faith can be?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, we give You thanks that each and every year the celebration of Christmas reminds us that You always have and always will do Your divine intervention into our world at just the right time! May Your light shine upon us and give us peace; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior, the Babe of Bethlehem. Amen.

Lesson 6: "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing"

OPENING: For a Christian witness, there is no better time of the year than Christmas! It would seem that during the weeks of December, the whole world is singing *our song*! There are many recently written songs that have become favorites, as well as the hymns of old. Mark Lowery and Buddy Greene's beautiful song "Mary, Did You Know?" stands among them.

What makes a good Christmas song? I would suggest that it is good if it teaches us something about who Jesus is and why He came into our world. There is one 18th century hymn that seems to do an excellent job of telling the story of Jesus. Let's read these great lyrics of Charles Wesley:

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 host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb,
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel!
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail, the heav'n born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with healing in His wings.
Mild, He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, there is so much to life when we know that You have created, redeemed, and preserved all things through Your amazing grace! Help us to sing Your praises in thought, word, and deed; for we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world, who was born in a barn. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. Read the following Bible verses and match lyrics from the hymn to each one. Some may be hard to connect with the lyrics, but give it your best!

- a) Luke 2:10-14 (*Hark! The herald angels sing*)
- b) 2 Corinthians 5:19 (*God and sinners reconciled*)
- c) Revelation 15:4 (*Joyful, all ye nations rise*)
- d) Hebrews 1:6 (*Born to raise the sons of earth*)
- e) Matthew 1:21-23 (*Jesus, our Immanuel*)

- f) John 1:1,14 (*Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see*)
- g) Philippians 2:7 (*Mild, He lays His glory by*)
- h) Isaiah 9:6 (*Hail, the heav'n born Prince of Peace*)
- i) Malachi 4:2 (*Hail, the Sun of Righteousness*)
- j) 1 Peter 1:3 (*Ris'n with healing in His wings*)

Do people who sing these verses realize how much of the Bible they are quoting?

2. Read Luke 2:8-20. Felix Mendelssohn, the composer of the tune to this hymn, actually wrote it for one of his operas. He once commented that this melody was "too merry" for these sacred words.

- a) What sort of tune do you imagine the angels singing to the shepherds?
- b) Were you one of the shepherds, would you think of someone else more likely to hear this serenade? If so, then whom?
- c) What sort of a light did the shepherds see?
- d) What do we expect to see when we look at something "glorious"?
- e) What in this story of the birth of the Christ Child was glorious in the eyes of God?
- f) What was the sign in this story that the shepherds had actually seen the light?
- g) What did they do after they saw the glory of God face to face?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, we thank You for choosing the humble shepherds to hear the song of the angels. And we thank You for the calling You have given us in our families, our work places, in the town where we live, and in our churches. Teach us, Good Lord, from the shepherds, to see Your glory in who we are and what we do; for we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, the King of glory, born in a manger. Amen.

Lesson 7: “As With Gladness, Men of Old”

OPENING: When a Christmas program is staged at churches or theaters, the single most elaborately costumed moment is when the Wise Men arrive on the scene, asking, “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2). It certainly is a strange moment, seeing these wealthy visitors from a strange land, coming to worship the Savior of the world who was born in a cow trough! Now it is difficult for preachers to avoid the temptation to explain that this event probably happened as many as two years after the Holy Child was born and that the Wise Men went to see the Baby and His mother, not in the manger, but in the house (verse 11). All of this notwithstanding, it is still an amazing moment to behold! It was for Mary and Joseph as well!

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, look down upon us, we pray, as we attempt to understand what an epiphany is and how You are still sending them to us, even today; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Newborn King. Amen.

DISCUSSION: There are many songs written for the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord. Here is a verse from one of the classics:

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.

1. Read Matthew 2:1-11. Here we also see several Old Testament prophecies fulfilled. List the verses from Matthew next to the verses listed here from the Old Testament:

- a) Micah 5:2 (*Matthew 2:6*)
- b) Isaiah 60:6 (*Matthew 2:11*)
- c) Psalm 72:8-11 (*Matthew 2:2*)
- d) Genesis 12:3 (*Matthew 2:1-2*)

By far, the most perplexing of these prophecies is the last one listed above. What does it mean that through the descendants of Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed”?

For the Jewish people, this ancient promise has been a hard one to visualize. For us Christians, is it any easier for us to see the promise fulfilled in the coming of the Wise Men?

2. William C. Dix wrote the hymn, “As With Gladness, Men of Old,” in the 19th century. Each of his verses connects what happened so long ago concerning the Wise Men to our following the star of Christ today. What are some of the ways the following two hymn verses teach us to do as the men of old did?

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

a) *(We can proclaim Christ as He leads us – see Isaiah 52:7); b) (We can seek His mercy – see Psalm 123:2-3); c) (We can seek the face of the Lord – see Psalm 105:4)*

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.

a) *(We can bring our gifts to the Lord in service to Him – see Malachi 3:10-12); b) (Our gifts don't have to be money, they can also be of time – see Ephesians 4:11-16); c) (Our gifts can reveal the kingdom of God in our fellowship with one another – see Psalm 133)*

3. The dictionary defines an epiphany as something “clearly apparent to the sight or understanding.” What type of epiphany was the appearance of the Wise Men to King Herod and all of Jerusalem? *(Jesus was identified as the King of the Jews.)*

4. Read Matthew 2:3-9, 13-21):

- a) Why did Herod seek to kill this newborn King of the Jews? When did others do what Herod failed to do? *(See Luke 23:35-38.)*
- b) Why would it have been scandalous for Wise Men from the East (Gentiles) to identify Jesus as the King even before Jerusalem knew about it? *(The Jews saw Gentiles as ‘sinners’ – see Galatians 2:15.)*
- c) When Jesus said, “and you will be hated by all for my name's sake” was He talking about people like the Wise Men? *(Give reasons for your answer.)*

5. Ultimately, Epiphany, as we celebrate it in the Christian Year, is a Mission Festival. The very last ones anyone could have anticipated finding the Light of the World and proclaiming their epiphany to the world would have been strangers from the East! Another 19th century hymn puts it this way:

Hail, O Source of ev'ry blessing, Father of our human race!
Gentiles now Your grace possessing, In Your courts obtain a place.
Grateful now, we fall before You, In Your church rejoice to live,
See, Your glory and adore You, Thankful for the grace You give.

CLOSING PRAYER: O God, You have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent Your blessed Son to preach to those who are far off and to those who are near. Grant that people everywhere may seek after You and find You; bring the nations to Your fold; pour out Your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of Your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lesson 8: “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”

OPENING: To this day, whenever Jewish families meet to observe Passover at their homes, they follow an order of service called a Seder where they talk about the 3,000-year-old event as though they themselves lived through it! For example, a quote from the Seder begins with the words, “when I was in Egypt ... “ The old African-American spiritual, “Were You There?” does something similar for us Christians as we observe the suffering and death of Jesus on Good Friday. The theme of this day in the Christian Year is darkness, not light.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, there is much for us to learn from those who have had to face the consequences of following Your Son Jesus to suffering and death as martyrs for the faith. Yet, even these martyrs were among those for whom Jesus suffered and died. Teach us from this song, dear Lord, about the length, breadth, depth, and height of Your love for us; for we pray in the name of Jesus, the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. Amen.

DISCUSSION: The Gospels themselves are scarce on the gory details of His suffering and death. St. Matthew uses an economy of words when describing what happened when Jesus was crucified: “*Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left*” (Matthew 27: 38). There are two places in the Bible that give us pictures of what it was like; and both of these are in the Old Testament.

1. Read Psalm 22:1-21. King David wrote this psalm 10 centuries before the crucifixion. We have every reason to believe that David was describing his situation and placing it before the Heavenly Father in prayer. How many of David’s verses fit the crucifixion of Jesus exactly?

a) (“*My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me*” – Matthew 27:46); b) (“*He committed His cause to the Lord; let Him deliver Him*” – Matthew 27:43); c) (“*My strength is dried up like a potsherd*” – John 19:28); d) (“*They have pierced My hands and My feet*” – Luke 23:33); e) (“*They divide My garments among them*” – John 19:23-24)

2. Certainly there is a reason why Psalm 22 is called the Crucifixion Psalm. What do these verses tell us about what would happen to Jesus when He suffered and died on the cross?

3. The first two verses of the spiritual ask us:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh ... Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?
Oh ... Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?

What pictures come to mind when you are asked “Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?”

4. Read Isaiah 53:1-12. The prophet Isaiah wrote his words seven centuries before Christ. Some Jewish rabbis maintain that this prophecy is retelling the story of the nation of Israel, reducing this story to one man. In many ways, we Christians would agree (see John 11:49-52). What are some things this chapter teaches us about Jesus (note at least one thing from each verse)?

a) *(He was a normal-looking man – verse 2); (He was despised and rejected by men – verse 3); b) (He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow – verse 4); (He was wounded for our transgressions, with His stripes we are healed – verse 5); c) (We have gone astray like sheep, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all – verse 6); (He was like a lamb, led to the slaughter – verse 7); d) (He was stricken for the transgression of my people – verse 8); (And they made His grave with the wicked – verse 9); e) (Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise Him – verse 10); (By His knowledge shall the righteous One, My servant, make many to be accounted righteous – verse 11); f) (He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors – verse 12)*

5. The spiritual continues:

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb,
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?
Oh ... Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?

Read Psalm 22:22-31. Here is King David’s prayer of thanks for God having heard his prayer. As with other psalms that suddenly burst forth with thanksgiving, there is no apparent pause in time between verses. How could this prayer of thanksgiving express the thoughts and feelings of Jesus as He neared His death on the cross? *(Remember He spoke the words of verse 1 from the cross.)*

7. How could we pray a similar prayer of thanksgiving to God for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for us?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, we give You thanks for both our up-standing and our down-sitting, for at both times You are calling us to follow. Draw us to our knees, we pray, in humble acknowledgment of Your great love for us and help us to rejoice that, when all is said and done ... love never ends; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior, who died and is alive forevermore. Amen.

Lesson 9: “Thine Is the Glory”

OPENING: It was the Tuesday after Easter 1977. I was serving my vicarage in Muskegon, Michigan. Another pastor in our community had just died on Easter Sunday. He had been admitted to the hospital six weeks before (on Ash Wednesday), and diagnosed with cancer. Talk about dying with your boots on! My pastor took me to the funeral in a packed little church. It was another Easter celebration! The preacher held up the pastor’s old Bibles. The preacher pointed out that the pages and cover were worn, explaining that these were well-used books. Then we sang an Easter hymn I had never heard before. Here is the first verse of the hymn written by Swiss pastor Edmond Budry:

Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory Thou o’er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave clothes where Thy body lay.
Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son,
Endless is the victory Thou o’er death hast won.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, as we consider the morning when the light of Your glory shined the brightest, show us today that Your death on the cross was not the last Word and that resurrection from the dead was; for we pray in the name of the risen and reigning Lord Jesus. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. Read Luke 24:1-12. There are three sets of characters in these verses. Under each category below, list how each reacted to the reality of the empty tomb:

- a) The Women: *(They had prepared spices and ointments for Jesus’ burial not knowing what to expect – see Mark 16:1-3. But once they heard the amazing Good News, they ran to tell it to the Eleven.)*
- b) The Angels: *(Their job was to explain to the women that, though Jesus’ enemies had achieved their goal of killing Him, they had not succeeded in defeating Jesus.)*
- c) The Eleven: *(Of all people, Jesus’ own disciples should have known what was going to happen on the third day. Jesus had predicted it three times. Yet they believed the Good News from the women to be an idle tale. Of course, the only exception was Peter, who at least went to the tomb – verse 12 – but left it wondering what had happened.)*

2. Were we to identify people in our world today with those in each of these groups, who would fit in each?

3. Read Luke 24:13-35. The second verse of our hymn describes this walk to Emmaus:

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly He greets thee, scatters fear and gloom;
Let His church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
For the Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.
Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won.

This time there are three people in the story. Once more, let us separate them to discuss what they said:

- a) The Disciples: *(Cleopas and his friend were disappointed and confused with the news of the events in the past three days.)*
- b) Jesus: *(It was amazing that the disciples were actually talking with the Risen Lord Jesus, but were unaware that they were doing so. They admitted that they recognized Him when He spoke these words: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.)*

4. Read Luke 24:36-52. The final hymn verse gives us a glimpse into the hearts of the disciples after they had actually seen their Risen Lord:

No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of Life!
Life is naught without Thee; aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors through Thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above.
Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won.

What are the things that finally made Jesus' resurrection real to the disciples?

- a) *(He invited them to handle His wounded hands and feet – verse 39); (He asked for something to eat, proving that He was not a ghost – verses 41-42); b) (He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures – verse 45); (He gave them a commission – verses 47-48); c) (He promised to clothe them with power from on high – verse 49)*

5. Finally, St Luke's Gospel ends with the disciples' unrestrained joy in the very temple where His enemies had interrogated Jesus. How can these verses from the Gospel of St. Luke and the hymn verse bring us this same joy?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, as we remember Your light that shines so bright at every daybreak, help us to see in this dawning the living proof that Your joy is stronger than any of our sorrows. Show us Your light and let it shine through us; for we pray in the name of Jesus, our Reigning Lord. Amen.

Lesson 10: “Holy Spirit, Light Divine”

OPENING: There are few things over which Christians disagree with each other than the meaning of the phrase “*filled with the Holy Spirit.*” This is a biblical expression, to be sure, although it is written in just two of the books of the Bible (St. Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles). Its most famous reference is in Acts, chapter 2:

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

Each year we celebrate this Day of Pentecost 50 days after we celebrate Easter. What is promised in the sending of the Holy Spirit is certainly important. In this Bible study we’re quoting the verses of Englishman Andrew Reed’s hymn, “Holy Spirit, Light Divine,” to discover what the Bible has to say about our being *filled with the Holy Spirit.*

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, we pray today for You to send us Your Holy Spirit and to teach us how this Spirit can be a light shining, a power cleansing, a joy cheering, and a divine dwelling within and among us; for we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus, who has sent us His Spirit as a witness to Him. Amen.

DISCUSSION: The following Bible verses are the ones quoted from St. Luke to describe those who were *filled with the Holy Spirit.*

1. Read the verses around these to determine what happened to fill these people with the Holy Spirit:

- a) John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-17) (*He was sent to turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.*)
- b) Elizabeth (Luke 1:41-45) (*The baby leaped in her womb in the presence of Mary, who was soon to give birth to Jesus.*)
- c) Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79) (*He prophesied about the role his son, John the Baptist, would have in preparing the way for the Savior.*)
- d) The Apostles (Acts 2:1-4) (*They spoke in other tongues on the Day of Pentecost.*)
- e) Peter (Acts 4:8-12) (*He spoke boldly to the Jewish Council about the healing of a crippled man.*)
- f) Peter and John’s friends in Jerusalem (Acts 4:23-31) (*They prayed and the place where they had gathered was shaken.*)
- g) Paul (Acts 13:4-12) (*He spoke against the Jewish prophet and magician Bar-Jesus.*)

2. Do these verses talk about the *filling of the Holy Spirit* as a gift from God? Why do you think so, or not?

3. Andrew Reed's hymn takes us in another direction when it comes to acknowledging the reality of Jesus' presence in our world and in our lives – the work of the Holy Spirit. This hymn prays for the Holy Spirit's presence in some specific ways:

Holy Spirit, Light divine, shine upon this heart of mine;
Chase the shades of night away, turn the darkness into day.

Holy Spirit, Power divine, cleanse this guilty heart of mine;
Long has sin without control held dominion o'er my soul.

Holy Spirit, Joy divine, cheer this saddened heart of mine;
Bid my many woes depart, heal my wounded, bleeding heart.

Holy Spirit, all divine, dwell within this heart of mine;
Cast down every idol throne, reign supreme and reign alone.

Too often we confuse our feelings with our hearts, when the Bible describes the heart as the source for both our thoughts and feelings (see Psalm 51:10-12 and Romans 12:1-2). Read Galatians 5:16-21. List the works of the flesh: (*immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissention, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing*)

4. How does St. Paul warn us about these acts? (*He says, "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*)

5. Read Galatians 5:22-23. In contrast, list the fruit of the Spirit: (*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*)

6. What does St. Paul say about these actions? (*He says, "Against such there is no law."*)

7. Read Galatians 5:24-26. St. Paul now uses "baptismal language" to describe what is being "crucified" and what is raised "by the Spirit" (see also Romans 6:1-14). We have just looked at one of several lists in the New Testament (another one is in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a). Some would call these lists "virtues," others would call them "guides." But another way of looking at these lists is to see in them a clear description of what the Spirit puts to death and what the Spirit then raises up in its place. The hymn describes the results of the Spirit's work as LIGHT, POWER, JOY, and IN-DWELLING. How can the persons we met in St. Luke's Gospel and the Book of the Acts illustrate each of these to us?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, we thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to live among us and within us. May He have His way with us; for we pray in the name of our Savior Jesus, to whom the Spirit bears witness. Amen.

Lesson 11: “Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying”

OPENING: This hymn is based on two vivid Bible pictures: the parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) and St. John’s vision of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation (chapters 20-22). The hymn is often sung in our churches either at the end of one Christian Year or at the coming (Advent) of the next Christian Year. This hymn talks to us about Christ’s Second Coming as a time of darkness about to be pierced by dazzling light. Appropriately, the tune to this hymn could be translated into English, “Wake Up!” (or German: “Wachet Auf”).

Wake, awake, for night is flying, The watchmen on the heights are crying;
Awake, Jerusalem, at last.
Midnight hears the welcome voices, And at the thrilling cry rejoices:
“Come forth, you maidens! Night is past!
The bridegroom comes! Awake; Your lamps with gladness take!”
Alleluia! Prepare yourselves to meet the Lord,
Whose light has stirred the waiting guard.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, we know from Your Word that there will come a time when every knee shall 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. Help us right now not to just watch, but to anticipate that day; for we pray in the name of our Savior Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.

DISCUSSION:

1. Read Matthew 25:1-13. What are some of the scary things about this parable and what are some of the comforting things the story teaches us?

a) SCARY THINGS: *(All of the maidens fell asleep waiting for the bridegroom because he was delayed. The foolish maidens ran out of oil for their lamps and missed the arrival of the bridegroom. The wise maidens didn’t share their oil with the foolish maidens. Finally, the foolish maidens were locked out of the marriage feast.)*

b) COMFORTING THINGS: *(The wise maidens took enough oil for their lamps. Thus, they were ready when the bridegroom arrived. They were the only ones to enter the marriage feast.)*

2. How does the following hymn verse answer the question: “Who are the wise and the foolish maidens?”

Zion hears the watchmen singing, And in her heart new joy is springing.
She wakes, she rises from her gloom,
For her Lord comes down all glorious, The strong in grace, in truth victorious.
Her star is risen; her light has come.
O, come, you blessed One, Lord Jesus, God’s own Son. Sing hosanna!
We go until the halls we view Where You have bid us dine with You.

(The wise are those prepared for the Lord’s coming; the foolish are not.)

3. There is a story behind these song lyrics. Philipp Nicolai's village in Germany's Westphalia was experiencing a terrible pestilence in 1597. This plague killed 1,300 people; there were days he buried as many as 30 people. Of necessity, this pastor turned frequently to God's Word. During this time, Nicolai wrote that he meditated on "the noble, sublime doctrine of eternal life obtained through the blood of Christ. This I allowed to dwell in my heart day and night and searched the Scriptures as to what they revealed in this manner."

What comfort do you think Nicolai found in the parable of the wise and foolish maidens?

4. Read Matthew 24:1-14. Christian people have disagreed vehemently with each other about when exactly the events Jesus is describing in these verses have or will happen. Actually, there are four different ways people have quoted the Bible to prove their theories about the end times are right and those of their opponents are wrong. But what, according to Jesus, is the key to knowing when the end will come? (*Verse 14 reads, "And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."*)

5. What are some of the questions you have about the days leading to Christ's return?

6. Read Revelation 21:1-16. John was the only one we know to have been invited to go up to heaven, to write down what he saw, and then to report about what is to come and to tell it to us. But, like a baby inside her mother's womb, it's difficult for us to understand a life where we have yet to live. Philipp Nicolai tries to help us to understand in his final verse:

Now let all the heavens adore You,
And saints and angels sing before You.
The harps and cymbals all unite.
Of one pearl each shining portal,
Where, dwelling with the choir immortal,
We gather round Your dazzling light.
No eye has seen, no ear Has yet been trained to hear what joy is ours!
Crescendos rise; Your halls resound;
Hosannas blend in cosmic sound.

The Bible ends as it began (see Genesis 2:18-24), with a wedding! Eternal life in heaven is described as a marriage feast. Who is the Bridegroom? (*Jesus*) And who is His Bride? (*His Church*)

7. What encouragement do the verses in Revelation describing the marriage feast give to you as you look toward your future?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, the future would be horrible had we not read the back of the Book and learned there that You win! Help us to know for certain that the kingdom of God is coming by itself without our prayers, but to pray that it may come to us also; for we pray in the name of our Risen and Reigning Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lesson 12: “Abide With Me”

OPENING: It’s a part of the job for a hospital chaplain to be on call. Quite often, when I’m roaming around the hospital late at night, I’ll pass by employees working the night shift. They know me as the chaplain and comment, “What are you doing here this time of night?” My reply is, “If I’m here at this hour, it’s probably not good news for someone.” Henry F. Lyte wrote the hymn, “Abide With Me,” just before he died in 1847. It tells us about the blessed hope we have as Christians.

OPENING PRAYER: Lord, we know that we all will die one day, but You give us hope for that day in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Teach us, good Lord, that knowing we will be healed or resurrected as we face sickness and death can be a blessed hope for us and for those whom we love; for we pray in the name of Jesus our Savior, who is the Resurrection and the Life. Amen.

DISCUSSION: Henry Lyte was another pastor. The story is told that when he visited the deathbed of William Augustus LeHunte in 1820, the patient kept repeating the words, “Abide with me.” Lyte wrote the hymn shortly thereafter and gave a copy to LaHunte’s brother, Sir Francis. But Lyte’s family and his gardener, Charles Potter, claim that the hymn was written after Lyte’s last sermon and Holy Communion, celebrated at Lower Brixham, England, on Sunday, September 5, 1847.

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

1. Read John 11:1-16. This chapter is the single longest Sunday morning Scripture reading as we travel through the three-year long cycle of these readings. It is usually read on the Sunday before Palm Sunday. Jesus delayed coming to Lazarus’ bedside intentionally, knowing that He would arrive after Lazarus died.

- a) Why does He claim He delayed His journey? (*see verses 4 and 13-15*)
- b) The German word for “disciples” is “Juenger” (adolescents). How do they indicate that they still don’t “get it?” (*see verses 14-16*) How do we face the certainty of death? Do we do it well, or poorly?

2. Henry Lyte’s hymn continues:

I need Thy presence ev’ry passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s pow’r?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.

Read John 11:17-27. Martha’s words (or ones similar) to Jesus have been spoken to dozens of caregivers over the years, “*Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died ...*” (verse 21).

- a) If these words were spoken to us, how would they make us feel? (*Guilty?*)

- b) Yet Martha also had faith in the face of death. She then said, *“And even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You”* (verse 22). What might Martha have expected Jesus to do for her now? (*Raise Lazarus from the dead? Or just to bring her peace?*)
- c) Jesus’ reply to Martha tells us what we know about our faith in eternal life: *“I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (verses 25-26). Then He asks, *“Do you believe this?”* Does Martha sound like she understands that Jesus is about to raise her brother from the dead? (*No, she says that she believes that her brother would rise again at the resurrection on the last day.*)

3. In his classic book *Good Grief*, Chaplain Granger Westberg describes the stages we go through when we grieve any loss. He lists 10 stages:

- 1) We are in a state of shock.
- 2) We express emotion.
- 3) We feel depressed and very lonely.
- 4) We may experience physical symptoms of distress.
- 5) We may become panicky.
- 6) We feel a sense of guilt about the loss.
- 7) We are filled with anger and resentment.
- 8) We resist returning.
- 9) Gradually hope comes through.
- 10) We struggle to affirm reality.

How can knowing this list help us to face our grieving?

4. Read John 11:28-37. Mary told Jesus the same thing Martha had (verse 32). Yet these verses also tell us something about Jesus. What does verse 35 tell us about the emotions of the Savior who knew that He was about to raise His friend from the dead? (*Knowing what was going to happen did not spare Jesus from His emotions.*)

5. Read John 11:38-44. Do you think Lazarus was happy or sad to be returned to his sisters and home after he had been in heaven four days? Why or why not?

6. Note the famous words of Henry Lyte’s last hymn verse:

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
 Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies.
 Heav’n’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee;
 In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

What lessons about grieving have you learned over the years?

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord, we thank You that You chose to redeem all of life by sending Your beloved Son to live with us in human flesh and blood, to die, to rise again from the dead, to ascend into heaven, and to come again on the Last Day in great power and glory. Help us to believe that even as He has been raised from the dead, so we also shall rise. So, help us not only to speak this ultimate truth, but to believe it as we live with one another; for we pray in the name of our Risen and Reigning Lord Jesus, who will come again to take us home. Amen.