

WINTER 2021-22

# Inscribed



**YELLOWSTONE**  
Theological Institute  
EST. 2012

O COME LET US ADORE HIM!

## An Invitation to Adoration

**REV. JIM KEENA**

*“O Come, Let Us Adore Him” is the theme for this issue of *Inscribed*. Which raises the question, how can we adore Jesus during this Christmas season? I believe the story of Jesus’s birth in Luke 2:8-20 guides us because it’s the story of an unexpected invitation, leading to a glorious revelation, resulting in the shepherds’ adoration.*

### UNEXPECTED INVITATION

During the evening of the first Christmas, God interrupted several shepherds working the night shift. He sent an angel to them with an unexpected invitation. Their immediate response wasn’t adoration but terror! But God’s messenger soothed their fears, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10). What was the good news? It was that the long-awaited Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. And they could find the

Christ child by searching, not in a king’s palace, but an animal’s feeding trough.

The story of the shepherds’ adoration begins with God’s unexpected invitation. The Lord sought the shepherds before the shepherds sought Jesus. Ezekiel 34:11 reads, “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.” God’s self-description is of

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Christmas Hope as the World Faces Another Challenging Year

From the capital riots on Wednesday, January 6 to the terrifying tornado outbreak in the Midwest on Saturday, December 11, 2021 has been quite a ride. And the year is not over yet! For the last year, our country has boarded a never-ending roller coaster ride of fear, agitation, anger, name-calling incivility, and outright violence: neighbor against neighbor, relative against relative, American against American, and, sadly, Christian against Christian. We enter 2022 looking at economic inflation, rising cultural violence, rising mental illness, and record numbers of deaths due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Not a happy place to be.

As followers of Jesus, you and I can take heart. We can make this world better by who we are and what we do in Jesus. You see, the Christian way is the way of unconditional love: love God, love your neighbor, love your enemy, love those who hate you and spitefully abuse you. That is who we are; it is what we do. That is how our world is changed. When you look into the face of Christ, the ultimate giver of gifts, He is going to ask you, “What are you going to do in my name, that our world will be a better place?”

### A POSITIVE CHRISTMAS FOR YTI!

Christmas 2021 sees YTI in its best financial position, and its best academic position since 2017. We have started our joint venture project with Providence Development Co., who have provided the best development team for which we could have hoped. The partnership is already bearing fruit. Our designers from Locati, Madison Engineering, Design 5, and all of the subcontractors are doing their absolute best to stay within our budget and give us a great product. We continue to enjoy great relations with our community partners as well—Raison D’Être Dance Project, Bozeman Actors Theater, and Blitzz Football Club—and our community



friends—MSU Spirit of the West, MSU Swing Cats, Excel Physical Therapy, Bozeman Symphony, and Intermountain Opera. We have established positive relationships with many of the churches in Bozeman, the Gallatin Valley, Great Falls, and Billings. We are becoming difference makers in the life of our expanding communities.

Potential student inquiries continue to rise, resulting in more applicants. In Fall 2022 we are expecting to double our enrollment through new EQUIP cohorts in Billings, Bozeman, and Great Falls. The EQUIP enrollment in Bellingham, Wash., will double in the fall to 15 students. That will mean 40 new students through EQUIP. Our MA programs continue to grow steadily. This growth isn’t as quick as the diploma growth, but the difficulty of the housing market in Bozeman is a challenge here. It is a positive Christmas for YTI.

### THE CHRISTMAS MIRACLE OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

And now for the Christmas takeaway: In the deepest, darkest part of winter, we celebrate the birth of God in the man, Jesus of Nazareth. He became like us, not simply to die for us, but also to show us how to be human. He came to show us what it means to live our lives in and with God, to show us how to live lives of divine love, and to bring that love to our world. He came to show us how to not live in fear. He came to show us who our real enemy is: not the politicians, not the Democrats, not the Republicans, not the fascists, not the socialists, but the principalities and powers of our world—the forces of darkness, the evil that plagues all nations, and all worlds. Friends, our communities, our state, and our nation will not change through politics or our political loyalties. Our world will change, as we embrace the way of Jesus ... the way of unconditional

love. The babe in the manger this Christmas would crucify our anger, hatred, and violence for the unconditional love He came to share.

I know just how hard the last few years have been. We do not thrive well on uncertainty. Truly, we “batten down the hatches” and hope to survive the rough seas. YTI has survived the rough seas, not because we are superhuman, but because we believe the love that is God will change the world.

A baby was born to an unwed Jewish couple over 2000 years ago. No hospital, no doula, no prenatal care, and no attending physician. They had sought refuge in a stable, and laid this new baby in a feeding trough. Just another immigrant baby, born to a construction sub-contractor and his super young fiancé.

Yet for some reason, the sheep herders and traveling foreigners stopped to see him in amazement. The crystal starlight of the heavens shone radiantly above him, and if you listened carefully, you could hear the music of the heavens in the wind.

The government hated these pests, these impoverished interlopers, and sought to drive them out—to murder them if they could. But the baby and his parents survived. Hope was born out of love. The baby became a man, and He showed us Love, because He was, and is, Love.

This Christmas, the most important thing you can give anyone is the miracle of unconditional love. That’s why the babe was born. So we can know love and change our world.

**Merry Christmas.**



**Dr. Jay Smith, President**  
**Bridger Professor of Theology & Ethics**

# WINTER COURSES\*

## BOZEMAN, MT

In-person @ YTI, 2030 Stadium Dr., Bozeman  
Distance learning available live online via Zoom

**THEO 531 Historical Theology II**  
JANUARY 3–7 | 9AM–4PM | TBA

**BIB 530 Biblical Interpretation**  
JANUARY 10–14 | 9AM–4PM | REV. BRETT DESPER

**BIB 531 The Biblical Narrative**  
JANUARY 17–21 | 9AM–4PM | MR. MATT GREEN

**BIB 535 New Testament 2: Romans to Revelation**  
JANUARY 24–28 | 9AM–4PM | DR. DERRY LONG

**CUL 531 Apologetics**  
JAN. 31–FEB. 4 | 9AM–4PM | MR. MATT GREEN

**THEO 532 Theology for the Church**  
FEBRUARY 7–11 | 9AM–4PM | DR. JAY SMITH

**COM 531 Introduction to Preaching and Teaching:**  
FEBRUARY 14–18 | 9AM–4PM | REV. JIM KEENA

**LED 532 Entrepreneurial Leadership**  
FEBRUARY 14–18 | 9AM–4PM | DR. DERRY LONG

**CUL 536 Christian Mission: Theology and Practice**  
FEB. 28–MAR. 4 | 9AM–4PM | MRS. KATHRYN GREEN

**BIB 534 New Testament 1: The Gospels and Acts**  
**10 WEEKS** | **MONDAYS** JANUARY 3–MARCH 7 | 6–9PM  
REV. BRETT DESPER

## BELLINGHAM, WA

Hosted by Hillcrest Church (1400 Larrabee)  
Distance learning available live online via Zoom

**BIB 532 Old Testament 1: The Torah and Histories**  
JANUARY 10–14 | 9AM–4PM | DR. NATHAN CHAMBERS

**MIN 531 Introduction to Pastoral Care**  
JANUARY 31–FEBRUARY 4 | 9AM–4PM | REV. JIM KEENA

**SPR 530 Spiritual Formation**  
FEBRUARY 14–18 | 9AM–4PM | REV. BRETT DESPER

**BIB 533 Old Testament 2: The Prophets and Poetry**  
FEBRUARY 21–25 | 9AM–4PM | DR. NATHAN CHAMBERS

*\*NOTE: All class schedules subject to change.*

# O Come, O Come Emmanuel

*Looking Forward with Hope & Joy*

**For many years, my favorite Christmas carol has been “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”** I think I have been

drawn to it because the music and the lyrics prompt a spirit of longing for Emmanuel, God with us, tinged with grief.

In it, Israel laments, because God isn't with them. While He did come to earth to dwell with us in Christ, He is no longer physically present with us, so we, as followers of Christ may also lament.

## KATHRYN GREEN

One year, I was touched by the prayer, because it really is a prayer, in a new way. I was teaching English in a small private college in the countryside of Mongolia. A group of American teachers had served at the college for some years and the pattern that had been established was to take a new incoming class and progress with them through their three years of study until graduation. But this year, due to illness, two beloved teachers had not returned, and the third-year students were without their teacher. They were a close-knit and special class of young students—nearly all Christians—and they had a truly special bond with their teacher. His inability to return grieved them and made many of them question whether they should continue their studies.

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

I was assigned to take over the class. I felt ill-equipped because I knew I couldn't replace their teacher. We struggled through the fall term together. Several of the leaders of the class announced their plans to leave the college and go on to other things, which only deepened the grief for the rest. As Christmas approached, we all wondered if there would be a class to continue with in the spring.

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell Thy people save,  
And give them victory o'er the grave.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

It was tradition at the college to have a dress-up Christmas party with a talent show. This was another thing that the two beloved teachers had instituted and run for years. We worked together with the Mongolian teachers to plan and prepare for the event, even though we knew it wouldn't be the same as all of us remembered. My class really wrestled with what to do for the talent show. Since it was approaching Christmas, I had begun using Christmas carols in class as English texts. I introduced “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” to them and the lament and grieving tone of the song connected with them, allowing them to express their combined


grief over their loss together. They decided to learn the song and sing it as their presentation at the talent show.

*O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,  
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

I think that finally being able to give voice to their grief fostered a new depth in their communal ties to one another. It also opened them to see the hope of Emmanuel actually being with them together as a class. They found so much joy in His presence with them that they decided to stay the course and finish the year together.

*O come, Thou Key of David, come  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Who knew that teaching a Christmas carol that I loved would have such an impact on this group of young people?

Well, God did. He enabled them to see that Christ really was with them, in their grief and struggles, and He really cared about each one of them. So, as you encounter this carol, lament that Christ is not with us face-to-face—though His very Spirit resides within us—but also look forward with joy, because our hope is secure and He will come again. O come let us adore Him! 



**KATHRYN GREEN** (M.A., *Phoenix Seminary & Wheaton College*) is Tutor in Diploma Studies at YTI. She brings a wealth of intercultural experience, with a background that includes serving in overseas missions and teaching in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

## SPRING COURSES

### BOZEMAN, MT

In-person @ YTI, 2030 Stadium Dr., Bozeman  
Distance learning available live online via Zoom

#### BIB 630 The Pastoral Epistles

MARCH 14–18 | 9AM–4PM | DR. JAY SMITH

#### COM 532 Advanced Preaching & Teaching

MARCH 28–APRIL 1 | 9AM–4PM | REV. JIM KEENA

#### THEO 534 The People of God: Being the Church

APRIL 18–22 | 9AM–4PM | MR. MATT GREEN

#### BIB 534 New Testament 1: Gospels & Acts

APRIL 25–29 | 9AM–4PM | REV. BRETT DESPER

#### MIN 531 Intro. to Pastoral Care

MAY 2–6 | 9AM–4PM | REV. JIM KEENA

#### LED 533 Leading Through Conflict

MAY 9–12 | 9AM–4PM | DR. DERRY LONG

#### SPR 533 Christian Spiritual Theology

MAY 23–27 | 9AM–4PM | REV. BRETT DESPER

#### MIN 538 Clergy Self-Care

10 WEEKS | MONDAYS MARCH 14–MAY 20 | 6–9PM  
REV. JIM KEENA

#### LED 531 Basic Leadership

10 WEEKS | TUESDAYS MARCH 18–MAY 21 | 6–9PM  
DR. DERRY LONG

#### CUL 530 Postmodernism & Christianity

10 WEEKS | MONDAYS/TBA APRIL 18–JUNE 6 | 6–9PM  
DR. JAY SMITH

### BELLINGHAM, WA

Hosted by Hillcrest Church (1400 Larrabee)  
Distance learning available live online via Zoom

#### BIB 530 Biblical Interpretation

MARCH 21–25 | 9AM–4PM | REV. BRETT DESPER

#### LED 532 Entrepreneurial Leadership

APRIL 18–22 | 9AM–4PM | DR. DERRY LONG

#### BIB 630 Deuteronomy

MAY 2–6 | 9AM–4PM | DR. NATHAN CHAMBERS

\*NOTE: All class schedules subject to change.

# Knowing the God Who Makes Himself Known

DR. JAY SMITH

*Yes Lord, we greet Thee  
Born this happy morning  
Jesus to Thee be all glory giv'n  
Word of the Father  
Now in flesh appearing  
O come let us adore Him  
O come let us adore him  
O come let us adore Him  
Christ the Lord*

— ADESTE FIDELES

*First published by John Francis Wade in his collection *Cantus Diversi* (1751)*

It's Christmas time! or, as Andy Williams sang,

*"It's the most wonderful time of the year!  
With the kids jingle belling, and everyone telling you  
be of good cheer...  
It's the most wonderful time of the year!"*

Well, maybe not the “most” wonderful time of the year, but pretty close! For many individuals however, it's a difficult time of the year. It can be dark, cold, lonely, and unforgiving for many who are impoverished, hungry, cold, and alone. Indeed, for many, it can be difficult to find God in all of the trimmings of the contemporary holiday. It's very likely that we will see the commercial Santa Claus holding a Coca-Cola™ before we see a child in a manger bathed in starlight and surrounded by mom, dad, shepherds, magi, and angels.

With the commercial meaning of Christmas conflicting so deeply with the spiritual meaning, it should be no surprise that so many find it more and more difficult to experience God this time of the year! Indeed, December's climbing cases of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and suicide stand as witness to this difficulty. The bottom line is before the commercial culture took over Christmas, it was the time where people could not only *experience*, but even *know* God. That is indeed the reason why God is incarnate—*made flesh*—in Jesus: so human beings could know God.

## HOW CAN WE ACTUALLY KNOW GOD?

As a theologian, I often think about the concepts of the “experience,” “knowledge,” and “presence” of God. How does a person *actually experience and know God*? Theologians point

to the concept of revelation: God's self-revealing, usually, if not exclusively in the Bible. Indeed, the Bible is the best way to know *about* God, at least the Jewish and Christian God. Yet, it's not necessarily the best way to *know God*. I used to ask my students to repeat after me, "God is God, and I am not." In other words, our attempts to know the Creator and Redeemer of all that is, the source of all Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, the absolute Love that is God, is not possible with our meager intellectual gifts.

However, like the toddler child reaching up for the embrace of her or his father or mother, we *can* reach up to God, and God will reach down to us. In this act, we can *know God*.

**"That is indeed the reason why God is incarnate—made flesh—in Jesus: so human beings could know God."**

When we ask God to "be with us" or simply sing, or cry out to God in adoration and worship, we find that God is there. We can sense God's presence, we can know God's love, and experience God's comfort, and *feel God's* very present energy.

Psalm 22:3 says, "Yet You are holy, You who are *enthroned* upon the praises of Israel." Here the Psalmist tell us that it's through our praises – our worship – that God is *present*. Even more telling is Paul's statement in Galatians 4:9,

"But now that you have come to *know God*, or rather to be *known by God*, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again?"

Paul tells the Galatians that they *know God* through the Spirit of Christ-God, who resides in their hearts. It is in this situation that you realize that you are *known by God*, a state of being by which God makes Himself known to us. When we praise God, the energy that is the presence-peace-love of God makes God known in us!

### SHRINKING BACK FROM GOD'S PRESENCE

Yet Paul does not end there. He asks why then do we "turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again?" Why do we

turn back? And what are the "weak and worthless elementary principles" he is talking about?

We turn back because of *fear*—a fear that is suggested to us by the Deceiver and our world. It is a fear that suggests God's presence is "too good to be true," or that "what we are 'feeling' is simply a psychological anomaly," and the like. So, having now doubted our experience of God, in an act of self-preservation, we pull back into our old familiar routines, believing that if we can't scientifically verify God's existence, then God must not be real. The doubt then feeds depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

### SIMPLY CALL ON JESUS!

There is a solution though. Speak, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." Speak this three times, then watch as the fog lifts. In the worst of times, God makes Himself known as we call out.

And then my favorite chaser: I sing so softly the chorus from *Adeste Fideles*: "O Come Let Us Adore Him, O Come Let Us Adore Him, O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the Lord." The fog lifts, and the joy returns.

Do you want to know God this Christmas? Do you want the anxiety and depression to disappear? Then simply call on Jesus, adore Him, sing to Him, and your life will change.

Merry Christmas! 🌿



**JAY SMITH** (*Ph.D., Trinity College University of Bristol*) is President and Bridger Professor of Theology and Ethics at YTI. He has pastored in several states and has taught at Howard Payne University, Baylor University, and the United States Naval Academy.



# Reading the Christmas Story Again for the First Time

## DR. DERRY LONG

Do you read some books more than once? I do. Colin Dexter, the British mystery writer, gave us Inspector Morse and his last in the series, *The Remorseful Day*, is a book I have read repeatedly for the sheer joy of it. Or how about George MacDonald's *Phantases*, a fantasy book that greatly influenced C.S. Lewis? Then there are some of Henri Nouwen's short books of devotional literature, stuffed with insights, which cause the reader to stop repeatedly as the weight of the truth disassembles preconceived notions of what is real.

There can't be a story in the Bible read as repeatedly as the Christmas story. But the layered nature of Scripture allows us to read it fresh, as if for the first time, and see insights emerge that seemed veiled in an earlier reading.

As I read the story again this year, I saw three things that seem so obvious, yet came more fully into focus when married to current life experience.

## A MESSAGE FOR THE EXCLUDED

The first is the glorious account of how the shepherds were the first to hear. From a Pharisee's point of view, the shepherds were unclean and part of a despised occupation. So right from the beginning, God was articulating via choice the nature of His message and the inclusive nature of His Kingdom.

My religious background was highly exclusionary—"come out from among them." And in this high-tech world, refashioning the invitation and re-envisioning who belongs is a necessary exercise in Kingdom perspective.

## AN INSIGNIFICANT PLACE

My wife Marcy and I just returned from San Antonio, Tex., and while there, journeyed down to Austin to see the LBJ library. In my youth, Johnson was a controversial president, presiding over a tumultuous time. I saw him in person at an event on the White House lawn. Not far from Austin is San Marcos. It was in this small town, home of Southwest Texas State, that Lyndon Johnson graduated from college. He always felt intimidated

by and reacted to the Harvard crowd, including the Kennedys, and tried to overcompensate for not graduating from a castle on the hill. San Marcos held no reputation and had no images that could only be described in superlatives, as with Frank Sinatra's New York, New York. And such is geographic prejudice. "Can any good come from there (Nazareth)?"


But in the "greatest story ever told," we start, not in Athens, or Rome, or Alexandria, or even Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem. It is estimated that even when Herod had all the male babies killed, it may have been no more than twelve or so. One student said, "We are bigger than our story." Scripture counsels not to despise small beginnings. We may have parts of our story that do not scream "keep your eye on this person, they are going somewhere." But that has little to do with our place in what is significant and meaningful.

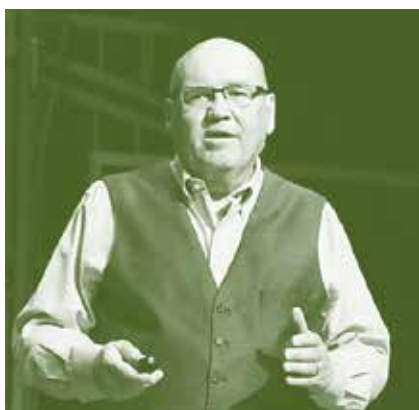
## A LIFE OF QUESTIONING

For the last, we move ahead to John 8. Jesus is talking to some Jews who had believed Him, but they were caught up in



their ethnic and religious identity and still saw Jesus as a threat. They were boasting that they were descendants of Abraham and argued that “We are not illegitimate children” (v. 41). One does not have to ponder long to understand that even these many years later, the circumstances of Jesus birth were murky—a truth that I dislike. I like being understood and abhor being misunderstood. But Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived out her life knowing that her responsiveness and willing obedience to God’s call resulted in others questioning her behavior and integrity throughout her life. And further, she knew that there was nothing she could do to clear up the misunderstanding.

A surprise selection for the declaration of God’s act, a puzzling event in a dismissed town, and a sustained sacrifice for a redemptive good. These leave us with the reflection, in what way might the Lord surprise us with His redemptive activity? Further, is our faith all about sureness, or are we open to the invitation to a disorienting appearance of the Lord into our controlled universe? 



**DERRY LONG** (Ph.D., University of Birmingham) is Professor of Christian Leadership at YTI and has served in ministry for over 45 years in many roles – pastor, church planter, pastoral coach, regional overseer, and international teacher.



# Slowing Down to Actively Adore Christ This Christmas

## REV. BRETT DESPER

I have the reputation of being a bit of a curmudgeon around our house as Christmas approaches. It is not that I do not like Christmas, but rather that I do not see the connection between most of what we do to celebrate the season and what the celebration is supposed to be about. To be sure, I do think the lights are pretty in our neighborhoods. I do enjoy the smell of the tree when I walk in the door at the end of the day. I love the closeness of family and the effort that goes into making that happen. All that being said, I think Christmas, for most of us in the western world, has become something far removed from celebrating the birth of Jesus or anticipating His return. To be clear, it is not the intent of the rest of this article to bemoan the commercialization of Christmas, but rather I hope to offer something to think about to

help us focus just a bit more on what the season is about. The theme for this year’s Christmas newsletter is “O come let us adore Him,” and I want to focus on this for the rest of this short article.

## THE MEANING OF ADORATION

What does it mean to adore somebody? For me, that used to bring up a picture of standing around looking fondly or lovingly at a tiny baby and saying the equivalent of “Isn’t he just adorable?” For others, it means that you either love somebody or you are inordinately fond of them, as in “I just adore him.”

This is what the first entry in the dictionary says it means: “to love and respect (someone) deeply,” which seems to be the meaning most of our culture adopts. When I took some time to look into the word, that picture is far re-

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moved from its contextual meaning. In this context, the word means worship – in other words, O come let us worship Him.

In our culture, worship is too often used as a noun or an adjective (e.g., I am going to the worship service, or worship was really wonderful today). However, in Scripture it is used primarily as a verb. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *qār-ab* meant bringing forward a gift or offering – much like the wise men did. *Hāwâ* means bowing down in reverence before God (or somebody in power). *Rûm* indicates exaltation or verbal praise of God—like the angels who met the shepherds in the fields. The New Testament uses *proskyneō* (to bow down), *kamptō* (bending the knee), *doxazō* (giving glory to God), and *eulegeō* (praising or blessing God) to communicate the same ideas. The main point here is that these all are active verbs—you are doing something to worship or adore God. This begs the question, what are some things we could do to “adore him” during this Christmas season?

### HOW WE CAN WORSHIP/ADORE HIM


First of all, and this might seem counter-intuitive to some, slow down. I find it is impossible to worship/adore God when I am so busy I cannot see straight. I have put this first because I think it is essential preparation for what follows. Realize that if you slow down, you might not be able to make everything you want to accomplish happen, and that is ok. Take some time away from all the busy preparations, parties, and other traditions your family might have and spend some time in God’s presence every day. Use this time to consider how amazing the incarnation is, to pray, to read Scripture, to enjoy being quiet in His presence, etc. Consider the part of advent that is so frequently left out—the hope of Christ’s return. Consider how amazing it is that Jesus has called us friends. Spend time listening to what the Spirit may have to say to your heart.

Second, spend some time praising God. This is a good time to start reviewing your year and see what God has done in and through you. Spend time giving thanks for all He has done.

Almost every church I know of has some extra services during the Christmas season. Go to some of them. Join with others praising God for who He is and what He has done. Find ways to celebrate the mystery of the incarnation in your family’s daily activities. Consider how amazing it is that the one and only Son of God became a helpless baby. The One through whom the universe was created became fully human and was born in Bethlehem in Roman occupied Israel. This still boggles my mind whenever I think of it.

Third, give of your time and finances. I know our calendars and budgets are usually stretched with all the preparations for celebrating Christmas, but take a bit of time to find ways to give of your time and finances to others. Volunteer at the local food bank, with Love INC, or some other organization in your community. Spend some time serving/helping others.

Those are my three suggestions. I have found that they help me to keep my focus on what Christmas is supposed to be about and off what our culture has made it. They have helped me to worship/adore Him.

Blessings to you and yours this Christmas season! 



**BRETT DESPER** (*D.Min. in process, Portland Seminary, George Fox University*) is Lecturer in Discipleship and Spirituality at YTI. An ordained minister, Brett brings 20 years of experience in education and leadership.



Inscribed

**Yellowstone Theological Institute**

P.O. Box 1347, Bozeman, MT 59771

406-404-1600 | [yellowstonetheology.org](http://yellowstonetheology.org)

**Jay T. Smith**, President

**Matthew C. Green**, Editor & Designer

**Kathryn Green**, Assistant Editor

► INVITATION FROM PAGE 1

a searching shepherd seeking His sheep. And in their case, God's sheep were literally shepherds.

God hasn't changed, and neither have we. The only way anyone finds Jesus is that God first invites them. In the chess match of our salvation, God always makes the opening move. He speaks to us via the Holy Spirit, God's Word, or God's people. He speaks through creation (Psalm 19:1-6) and into our conscience (Rom. 2:15), or with a "gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12). And ultimately, God has also "spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). The person of Jesus is both God incarnate and God's personal invitation. And Jesus still invites people to "Come and see" (John 1:46).

## GLORIOUS REVELATION

For the shepherds, the angel's appearance was unexpected but straightforward. There was only one angel with one message. But suddenly, the solo angel was "joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him" (Luke 2:13-14, *The Message*). Any doubts the shepherds were harboring disappeared the instant the angelic chorus appeared. Visually and vocally, they confirmed the angel's message. The shepherds caught a glimpse of the supernatural. They saw the glory of God and heard the good news of the gospel.

Rachel Gilson describes this glorious revelation recorded in Luke 2:8-20:

*The overwhelming tone of this passage is joy. God has sent his Son to earth, and heaven's celebration spilled down to the world with praise and stunning glory. And to whom does the joyful announcement come? Not to the most glorious of humanity, but rather to the most normal, mundane, and even earthy. The text reeks of animals, from the sheep being watched by the shepherds to the feeding trough that cradled Jesus. Christmas is a stunning picture of the gospel: God did not abandon his creation, but went a great distance, at great cost, to personally redeem it.*

## SHEPHERDS' ADORATION

The angel's message and the choir's singing were convincing. Afterward, the shepherds said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened..." (Luke 2:15a). The shepherds became seekers. And God promises He "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). A proper response to God's

glorious revelation is to seek the One who sought you. Why? It's rewarding!

The shepherds eventually found Mary, Joseph, and the baby. Luke records two different responses to finding Jesus. One was internal, the other external, but both are indispensable. Mary adored Christ in her heart, and the shepherds adored Him with their words. Luke writes, "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). But the shepherds glorified and praised God for all that He had done. And that's what adoring Jesus is, worshipping Him in our hearts and glorifying Him with our voice. It's pondering and praising.

So, returning to the opening question, how can we adore Jesus during this Christmas season? Realize God takes the first step toward us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). And our proper response is to seek the God who's seeking us. We turn toward the God whose posture is turned toward us through faith and repentance. Jesus plainly said, "Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). And the more we move toward God, the more we experience God's love and glorious grace, which stirs our hearts toward adoration and our voices to praise!

One of my most memorable worship experiences occurred during college. A couple of well-known Christian recording artists led worship in our chapel service. As the concert concluded, they led us in singing acapella, "O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!" As we sang, I closed my eyes and worshipped Christ the Lord. When the chorus ended, I opened my eyes to discover the couple had quietly slipped away through a side door. The stage was empty and quiet. The worship service ended without applause but silence. And even though it wasn't Christmas, I adored Jesus. 🌿



**JIM KEENA** (*D.Min. in process, Western Seminary*) is Professor of Pastoral Theology at YTI. He brings 30 years of pastoral ministry experience, including 12 years at E-Free Church of Bozeman.

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