

How to use *O COME EMMANUEL* as a family devotional

by Gordon Giles

On each day from December 1 through January 6, *O Come Emmanuel* offers a carol or other Christmas music. Sometimes it will be easy to find a recording or even sing together the music suggested. On other days it may be impossible. But in any event it can be helpful to spend a few moments together reflecting on that day's Bible passage. Each passage is listed below with a few questions to help you in your quiet time together, whether around the table, in the car, or walking.

December

1 Advent Responsoy — Matthew 25:31–33, 41–46

As a family, would you say you are rich, or are you poor? Try to give something to someone who has less than you today.

2 Come thou redeemer of the Earth — Isaiah 9:6–7

Bishop Ambrose of Milan became a Christian and a bishop on the same day. What do you think of that? Do leaders need experience?

3 Laudes Regiae — Revelation 11:15–18

Should Christians be interested in politics? Should politicians be interested in religion? Look at a newspaper to help you decide.

4 Lo he comes — Revelation 1:3–8

What would it be like if Jesus came back tomorrow? Read the Bible and use your imagination!

5 Wait for the Lord — 1 Thessalonians 5:4–11

Have you ever been the victim of a crime? How did it feel at the time? How does it feel now? Pray for all those who suffer at the hands of others, and for all who commit crimes, that they may turn away from sin and live in fear of the Lord.

6 St. Nicholas — 1 Timothy 3:1–8

What do you really know about Santa Claus? Think about children who celebrate today. What would Santa Claus think about stores and shops today?

7 This is the record of John — Luke 1:68–79

Have you begun Christmas preparations? Have you prepared your heart to welcome Christ? How might you do that?

8 Thou whose almighty word — Luke 12:35–39

Prepare yourselves for something unexpected, and ask a member of the family to do something for you when you are least expecting it! How does it feel to be taken by surprise?

9 Earth was waiting — Romans 8:18–25

When did you last have to wait a long time for something? How long was it? Was it worth the wait? How long will God wait for us? Try to be especially patient today.

10 People Look East — Baruch 5:5–9

Have you written your Christmas cards yet? Perhaps do some today and pray for those to whom you send them. Look at the cards you have received already, and give thanks to God for the people who sent them.

11 Born in the night — Isaiah 59:20–60:5

Take a piece of wood, or visit a tree. What can wood be used for? Think of all the good things wood can make—and all the bad things. Wood can make a crib or it can make a cross. What would you make?

12 Tavener's The Lamb — John 1:29–37

If you have a computer or access to the Internet, do a search for “lamb,” “sheep,” or “ewe” in the Bible. When did you last see a real sheep? William Blake wrote his poem for children—what do you think of it? Read it together.

13 Santa Lucia — Matthew 5:14–16

Think about your Christmas traditions—how many of them are Christian? Which are not? Get an atlas and look at Scandinavia, and pray for the people of those lands today as they celebrate light at this darkest time of the year.

14 Of the Father's Heart begotten — Matthew 1:1–17

Ask the older members of the family to tell the story of your family. Where did you come from? How many generations can you remember? What do you think will have happened to your family in 30 generations' time? Give thanks that Jesus was born not so long ago.

15 This is the truth sent from above — Genesis 2:7, 15–18, 21–25

What do you think about environmental issues? Try to find out something today about the state of God's earth. What can be done by one person? Make a commitment to do something that will cause less environmental damage.

16 Adam Lay ybounden — Genesis 3:1–8

Try to imagine what it would be like if Jesus had not been born. What would life be like without God, without Christ, without the church, and without the fellowship that we share with other Christians at home and abroad? Give thanks for faith and fellowship.

17 O come O come Emmanuel I — Isaiah 7:4, 11:10, 22:22; Malachi 4:2

God calls each of us by name. How did you get the name you have? How many names for God and/or Jesus can you think of? Does it matter what you are called? If your name is the same as that of a saint or a Biblical character, look it up and find out about that person.

18 O come O come Emmanuel II — Luke 21:20–28

Walk around the shopping malls or streets. How much Christmas is there? Can you detect the light of God shining in any of the decorations? Try to find the message of Christmas in what you see and hear in the stores. Give thanks to God that we still celebrate Jesus' birth, and pray for those who do not understand.

19 Once in Royal David's City — Luke 2:1–7

When and how were you born? How did your parents feel? Was there any danger, or did all go well? Tell each other stories of birth. Think about or find out about places where there is no technology to assist with childbirth, and where children (and their mothers) so often die so soon. Pray for them and give thanks for your own survival.

20 Gabriel's Message — Luke 1:26–38

Do you believe in angels? Imagine you are Mary, and Gabriel comes to call. How would you feel? What would you have said if God asked you to do something so terrifying? When was the last time God asked you to do something? Did you do it?

21 Ave Maria — Luke 1:39–45

Do you have any cousins? Phone them or meet them today. Find some good news on TV or in the press—share it together and celebrate it.

22 Masters in this Hall — Luke 1:46–55

On December 1 we thought about the rich and the poor. Have you changed your mind? Once again, be generous to someone who has less than you. Poverty does not go away, but returns to haunt us and demand our love and our compassion. Give a Christmas gift to a charity.

23 The Cherry Tree Carol — Matthew 1:18–25

Think about Joseph—how must he have felt? Can you think of anyone else who behaves well when they might have every right to behave badly or “properly”? When is it right to do the “wrong” thing? If someone wrongs you today, try to respond in a loving way.

24 Hark! the herald — Luke 2:8–14

As you put presents around the tree, think about what the best present could be. What do you want for Christmas? What did God give us for Christmas? What can you give in return? Put an envelope on the tree addressed to Jesus, and offer him something you can give.

25 While Shepherds watched — Luke 2:15–20

Go to church today, and you may well sing this hymn. Think about the words and notice what they are saying. Can you sing the carol without looking at the words? Can you tell the story of Jesus' birth without looking it up? Tell it to each other as you enjoy your meal or before you open your presents.

26 Good King Wenceslas — Matthew 25:34–40

Are you hungry today? Are you still enjoying your presents? Is there anyone lonely you can invite into your home, for company and refreshment? Or someone to go and see?

Remember those who are alone at this time of year and try to help them in whatever small way.

27 The Candle Song — John 1:1–9

Take a candle and study it. How is it made—was it made in a mould or rolled? Perhaps make a candle yourselves. Light it and turn all the lights off. How much light does it give—is it enough? Blow it out and spend a few moments in complete darkness. Relight it—how bright it shines! Think of all those who do not or cannot enjoy Christmas. Why might that be? Pray for them in the light of the candle.

28 Coventry Carol — Matthew 2:16–18

Today is one of the saddest in the church's year, as we remember children killed by Herod. Christ died for us, but they died for him. Try to understand why Herod did this. Is such a thing ever acceptable? What happens to people who do things like that? Light yesterday's candle for all children who die violently. You do not need to say anything.

29 The Shepherds' Farewell — Matthew 2:13–15

Walk around every room in your house and see how much space you have. Can you imagine leaving—and under what circumstances? Have you ever run away from anything? What if there is nowhere to go? Pray for those who have fled their homes—from which countries of the world are they? Look at an atlas and see where refugees are from and where they have gone.

30 In the Bleak Midwinter — Philippians 2:5–11

Does it snow where you live? Do you like snow? Look at some Christmas cards—how many have snow on them? Is it likely that it snowed when Jesus was born? Can you remember what you put in the Christmas envelope as a present to Jesus? Have you honored it?

31 The Christmas Oratorio — Hebrews 1:1–6

Today we end the year. How has this year been? What have been the high points and the low points? Make a list of five good things and three sad things. Put your lists in an envelope and place them around the tree. (When the tree comes down, destroy them.) Write "thank you" at the top of one list and "sorry" at the top of the other. You do not need to show your lists to anyone else, but you might like to.

January

1 What child is this? — Matthew 2:1–4

Listen to "Greensleeves" if you can. Who is Jesus? What do you know about him? See if you can build up a picture without looking anything up. Sing or listen to "What child is this?"

2 The 12 days of Christmas — Esther 9:17–22

Sing this song or listen to a recording. Do you know it? Can you sing it without looking at the words? Try to work out what the numbers might mean—and see if you are correct (look in the book). Are songs like this helpful?

3 A new Dial — The Apostles' Creed

Can you remember any nursery rhymes? Sing them if you can. Do you think they mean anything? If you want a bit of fun, look at www.rhymes.org.uk. See if you can make up your own rhyme or a song with a Christian message.

4 Tomorrow shall be my dancing day — Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, 11

Search through your Bible for references to dancing (there aren't many!). Do you like dancing? Have you ever danced for the Lord? Try it—express your faith in movement. You might prefer to do this on your own, after you have discussed it a bit!

5 Ahmal and the Night Visitors — Luke 4:14–22

Talk about when you were last ill: How were you cured? Have you ever witnessed or experienced a miracle? Try to think of one. Some people are not healed of sickness, but they can be healed spiritually—how might this be? Light your candle again, this time for people who you know who are sick. Watch a video of “Ahmal and the Night Visitors” if you can get one.

6 We Three Kings — Matthew 2:5–11

Try to remember today what you received for Christmas, and write thank-you letters if you haven't already. What are the greatest riches you can have? What is the best present you have ever received? Some of your Christmas presents will have been spent or eaten by now. Think about the gift of God in Christ—how long will that last?