

Christmas Playlist: The First Noel

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[0 : 00] So my name is Kent Dixon. It's Sunday, December 3rd. Wow. Did someone just say no? It's like, no! So welcome to each of you this morning, whether you're here looking back at me, which I love, or whether people are listening online or in the days I had on the website and the podcast and things like that.

So this morning, as we begin the season of Advent, first of all, ugly Christmas sweater. So you can wear an ugly Christmas sweater every Sunday. It's allowed. No one will judge you. In fact, I'll judge you if you don't. Kidding. But we did this last year during our Christmas series, and it was fun. So feel free, because I'll do it, and I don't want to feel like the only one.

All right. So as we begin this season of Advent, you'll see this wreath in front of me and candles. And the wreath itself is shaped like a perfect circle.

And it symbolizes that circle, the eternity of God. Each candle has a significance as well. And on each Sunday of the Advent season, we'll recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us.

[1 : 14] And in all the research I've done, everybody does it differently. Different words, different orders. Paul is laughing. I even did some more research this year, because I've had it slightly different the past couple of years.

And I thought, there's got to be an actual theological anchor. No, not even close. So, I have tweaked, but that's okay. You won't know the difference, but I do.

So, the four virtues that Jesus brings us are hope, peace, joy, and love. So this morning, I'm lighting the first candle, which symbolizes hope.

And like Jesus, we say, let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to them. We celebrate the wonder of the star placed high above Bethlehem, sent as a sign from God to announce the fulfillment of our deepest hopes and dreams.

The birth of Emmanuel, God with us. Today, I encourage each of you to focus on the hope that we have, knowing that Jesus is the answer for our deepest needs.

[2 : 31] So, at this time of year, particularly in the church, we begin to hear this word, Advent. And I have friends who are not super liturgical pastors, and they say, oh, why do you do Advent and Lent and all that stuff?

And I said, well, last time I checked, it's part of the church calendar. So, I think it's important that we dig into some of these things. And you've heard me mention it already.

You see it on the slide. So, Advent is not a when, but a what. That's a good thing to begin with. It is a thing. It's a noun.

So, generally, the noun Advent is used for the introduction of something important. The advent of electricity. The advent of certain types of discoveries.

And in the church, the advent season includes these four weeks leading up to Christmas beginning today. Because, I think you recognize this, we're anticipating something important.

[3 : 34] We're remembering the birth of Jesus and all that means for us personally and also for the world. Think the world needs Jesus right now?

So, it does indeed. So, good morning, everyone, again. What a special time of year this is, right? Do you feel it a little bit? I have friends who, there's, in the 80s, there's a pop band called Wham. Maybe you've heard of them. Maybe you haven't.

They have a song. I think I can say it without breaking the rules. They have a song called Last Christmas. So, you may hear it on the radio. Last Christmas, I gave you my heart.

Very next day, I gave it away. So, there's a game that people play at Christmastime called Whamageddon. So, leading up to December 1st to December 25th, you cannot hear that song sung by that band on the radio.

[4 : 33] And if you do, you're out. So, I have friends online playing this game already. And a few of them are already out. And they're very sad. So, Christmas songs, though, those are big things for us, right?

I've been listening to Christmas music for a few weeks now. We have our tree up and decorated. We have candles on our mantle. And oftentimes, Michelle will come down from upstairs and I'll just be sitting.

And she said, are you in there in the dark? I said, well, the tree lights are on and the candles are on. But aren't you on your phone or anything? Nope. Just sitting peacefully thinking about Christmas. So, this morning, we're starting this brand new Christmas series called Christmas Playlist. So, most of you, we've talked a little bit about music already. Most of you probably know what a playlist is. So, when you're listening to music in the car or while working out, I have an app on my phone called Spotify. So, when I walk, I listen to different playlists that I have of different kinds of music.

[5 : 33] But you can select all the songs that you want to have and put them in a specific playlist. So, today, if we had to select songs for an all-time best Christmas songs playlist, chances are we would probably agree on many of the same selections.

I like a lot of Sinatra. I like a lot of Harry Belafonte. I like a lot of those things. I like Boney M at times. But did you know, hopefully you did, many of our favorite Christmas songs actually point to Jesus.

And I love being out somewhere and hearing a Christmas carol and recognizing the theological significance of it and the message that is just boldly declared right there.

And people are hearing the gospel and hearing the truth of the birth of Jesus Christ and they don't even know it. It's very covert. I love that. But when we celebrate Christmas, we're celebrating, we're remembering the incarnation.

Jesus coming in human form. So, whether you've never heard this story before, chances are all of you have, or you've heard it a thousand times or a million times, I'm grateful that we're beginning this series together.

[6 : 57] And throughout this series, we're going to look at four different songs, four different Christmas carols. But we're not going to unpack the songs themselves. I'm not going to talk about the composer or the lyricist or anything like that.

We're going to learn the biblical meaning and significance of each of these songs. So, it's going to be a bit different Christmas series, but you know me, and if you've been around for every Christmas series I've done so far, I like to think outside the box.

So, this is one that I hope will be fun, it will be enjoyable, but will also be an important reminder for us. And today, we're starting with teaser, Len Lettuce in it, one of the most well-known Christmas songs of all time, the first Noel.

So, if you think of the word Noel, and you don't know its origin or its meaning, maybe you think of Pat Sajak and Wheel of Fortune. Is there an L?

Noel. No L. The word Noel is actually French, by the way. It originates from a Latin word, nasi, N-A-S-C-I, which means to be born.

[8 : 12] That's what Noel means. Which came to be associated with Christmas, and particularly, the first Christmas. The first Noel.

So, to start, if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Luke 2. And you may even have it memorized, because you hear it on Charlie Brown every year.

This is probably the most read gospel account during the Christmas season, because Luke's account gives us some remarkable details about the birth of Jesus. So, this is a really familiar gospel account.

So, let's hear these words. Luke 2, verses 8 to 15. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you.

[9 : 21] He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So this good news that the Bible speaks of, what is that? Is that an obvious question? What does it mean for us today?

It's the first Noel. Jesus Christ coming into the world, even as a baby boy, meant that God in the flesh had arrived.

So I want to tell you a bit about this good news today, and we're going to look at what it means for our lives. First, the good news promises joy, and there's some verses there.

[10:38] So maybe today, so far this morning, you've had a good day. It's been okay. Maybe you had an okay rest last night. Michelle will ask me in the morning, How did you sleep?

And I usually go, Eh, I don't sleep well. Most of you know that. So you got to church on time, maybe. You have plans for a relaxing afternoon. You're going to do some things today.

And so I hate to break it to you, but the odds are pretty good that something may happen to you today that wasn't planned. That tends to happen.

Something may happen that will test your patience. Something may happen that might try to ruin your good mood. So it's in those moments, my friends, when we begin to recognize there's a difference between happiness and joy.

God doesn't want us to settle for something that comes and goes, that is fleeting. He wants to give us a gift that will last for eternity.

[11:45] And this, my friends, is the promise of good news. It's exactly what the angel of the Lord says to these shepherds who are minding their own business, really.

Good news will bring them great joy. Joy. And the Bible also says elsewhere that the joy of the Lord is your what? Strength.

Nehemiah 8, verse 10 says, Then he said to them, Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready.

For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So when we decide to not only hear the good news of Jesus Christ's coming, his crucifixion, his resurrection, but when we hold on to that, the joy God gives us through obedience becomes our source of strength.

And it's probably why Paul says this in his later writing. 2 Corinthians 12, verse 10 says, For the sake of Christ then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

[13:13] For when I am weak, then I am strong. When we accept and believe this good news of Christ, we're meant to reflect and exude the joy that God has promised to us.

We're expected to, we should, by association, exude that joy in our lives. And that joy only comes from the Lord.

Would you like some more good news? Because it doesn't stop there. The good news results in praise. Let's look again at what happens immediately after the angel delivers this good news to the shepherds.

Luke 2, 13 and 14, if your finger is still in the book of Luke. Remember, we just read this. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

The Bible says the angel was joined by a vast host of others, the armies of heaven. And what were they doing? Praising God.

[14:35] Friends, we need to understand that when we come to accept and believe the good news of Christ, it should naturally lead us into praising God and his magnificent gift to us.

So when I injured my hand and I was in the thick of healing and rehab, I'm still rehabbing somewhat, there were times when I felt overwhelmed.

I felt deeply discouraged and like I was helplessly and hopelessly unprepared to face that long road of recovery. And in the middle of all of that, there was never any guarantee, there still isn't, of what the end result could be.

I was weak. My circumstances felt hopeless to me at times and I struggled, struggled to be optimistic. And you know I tend to be an optimist.

But I never doubted that God was with me. Never. And that Jesus was all too, is all too familiar with pain and physical struggle.

[15 : 54] And that he will ultimately use all of my journey to shape me and bring about his will for me and how he wants to use me.

And this is just my story. Each one of you have your own stories. But your story and mine likely have things in common. We both either came to an understanding of the gospel or will come to one still in our lives.

And maybe today you've never thought about Jesus in this way. You always knew maybe a little bit about his death and resurrection but not really where it started. As I was doing some devotions this morning I was kind of touched by something that I don't want to give away too much because this is my Christmas Eve kind of thinking.

I read a devotion this morning and I went weird. That's exactly what I'm thinking the kind of route I'm thinking of going for my Christmas Eve devotion.

Got it God. Got it. So yeah. Tune in. I think yeah and I'm about to go into more of that but I don't want to spoil it.

[17 : 14] So we tend to compartmentalize Jesus. This is a teaser for Christmas Eve. Jesus. Baby Jesus. Christmas time. Ministry of Jesus in his 30s.

I like that Jesus. Jesus was if you watch The Chosen Jesus seemed to have been fun to hang around with. He was challenging. He called people. He was engaged. He was controversial. Jesus died.

At Easter we get sad and then we celebrate but Jesus is coming again. But do you see that how we compartmentalize Jesus at different times of the year different occasions same Jesus.

Teaser. So the reason that this promise of Jesus' birth is good news it doesn't actually have to do with Luke 2 when it's announced.

I don't know if you've ever thought of that before because we actually need to look back to the Old Testament to really understand its significance. You won't be surprised.

[18 : 16] Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14 says therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.

So this promise is made and written in the book of Isaiah. Do you know the timeline? Approximately 700 years before the birth of Jesus in Luke 2.

700 years. And yet even then God was prophesying that one day he would come in the flesh.

And we're going to consider the word Emmanuel more later in the series. So can you imagine how much praise must have been given to God when the good news was announced as a reality 7,700 years after it was first prophesied.

Well first of all you might be thinking well people was it just passed on after generation after generation? Yes. So this promise of a Messiah would have been passed on from generation to generation until his birth came to be.

[19 : 38] So finally this Messiah this God in the flesh was actually here to walk with his people. And even now as God's people we can participate in this continuous praise for God granting us the gift of Christ.

It's an invitation into something more than ourselves because the good news truly invites us in. The good news is an invitation.

So we read about the angels response to the good news but what about the shepherds in the story? Well here's what the Bible says.

Luke 2 verse 15 says when the angels had left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to one another let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about.

The shepherds had the faith to believe that the Lord indeed had spoken to them and because of this they couldn't stay silent.

[20 : 49] They couldn't stay still. They had to go and see for themselves what this amazing promise was. And in fact today all these years later centuries later we have been given a similar invitation.

Do you believe that God has spoken to you about Jesus? Do you believe that God prophesied about Jesus hundreds and hundreds of years ago?

Do you believe that Jesus came to this very earth as the Bible says? Do you understand and accept the good news?

We need good news these days don't we? Friends I believe this good news invites you and I into something that this world could never offer.

Something eternal and everlasting. Something that will bring great joy to our lives. Not great happiness. Not a great feeling for now.

[21 : 58] Great joy. something that will grant us the peace that we have been craving. Something that calls us to have faith to believe that the promise that we've been given is true.

The good news. The first Noel. Jesus Christ. I can't possibly know everything about your story your goals your hurts your dreams I know some of them but there are things that you don't share that impact you that have shaped who you are but I do know that everyone who hears this message whether it's in person or some other way is confronted with the same question at some point in their lives do you believe and accept this message as good news if so and you've never invited Christ to be your Lord and Savior talk to someone you know and trust about how you can do that the Holy Spirit will come into your life to convict and comfort and lead you on the greatest journey you could ever take and the promise that we've been given as well is that we will never be alone Jesus my friends will always be with you always the Spirit will guide you and your brothers and sisters in faith will walk beside you amen amen