

SESSION 1: THE FIRST NOEL

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the literal meaning of “The First Noel?” How does the song narrate the story of the birth of Jesus?
2. How does the cultural and historical context of the time when the song was written influence its message? In what ways does “The First Noel” reflect the Christmas traditions and beliefs of its time?
3. Share your personal connection to “The First Noel.” Does it hold any special memories or significance for you? If you have a favorite rendition/recording of the carol, consider sharing it with the group.
4. Compare and contrast “The First Noel” with other Christmas carols. What sets it apart, and what similarities does it share with other songs?
5. Discuss your interpretation of specific lyrics, or verses. Are there lines that stand out to you as particularly meaningful or thought-provoking?
6. Each verse of “The First Noel” focuses on a different moment of the story of the birth of Jesus. If you were to add your own verse to this carol, what part of the story of the birth of Jesus would you focus on that keeps with the gentle, yet holy feeling of the song?

[illegible]

THE FIRST NOEL

The first Noel, the angel did say,
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

They looked up and saw a star,
Shining in the east, beyond them far;
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.

And by the light of that same star,
Three Wise Men came from country far;
To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.

Then entered in those Wise Men three,
Full reverently upon their knee,
And offered there in His presence
Their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought.

Refrain:

*Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
Born is the King of Israel.*

[illegible]

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: THE FIRST NOEL

Blessed Advent. In this session, we'll explore the history and lyrics of the classic carol, "The First Noel."

Transcending generations, this beloved carol evokes a sense of wonder and joy during the festive seasons of Advent and Christmas. Its hauntingly beautiful melody and evocative lyrics transport listeners to the serene scene of the Nativity, captivating hearts with the essence of the holiday season.

The exact origins of "The First Noel" remain somewhat mysterious, as it hails from a time when many traditional carols were passed down through oral traditions. One theory suggests that the carol may have been inspired by French folk melodies, while another proposes that it originated as a traditional Cornish carol. The first recorded version of the song is believed to date back to the 17th century. The word "Noel" itself is derived from the French word "Noël," meaning Christmas.

The lyrics of "The First Noel" narrate the story of the Nativity according to the Gospel of Luke. Let's explore the meaning behind a few of the most frequently included verses:

Verse one: *The first Noel, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay; in fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter's night that was so deep.* This opening verse transports us to the Bethlehem countryside, where an angel announces the miraculous birth of Christ to humble shepherds. The vivid imagery of the cold winter's night sets the scene for the divine proclamation.

Verse two: *They looked up and saw a star, shining in the east, beyond them far; and to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night.* The reference here to the guiding star reflects the biblical account of the Star of Bethlehem, which guided the wise men to the location of Jesus' birth. The star's radiant light symbolizes the divine nature of the event.

Verse three: *And by the light of that same star, Three Wise Men came from country far; to seek for a King was their intent, and to follow the star wherever it went.* This verse introduces the Wise Men, or Magi, who, inspired by the celestial phenomenon, embark on a journey to pay homage to the newborn King. Their quest symbolizes the universal recognition of Jesus' significance.

Verse four: *Then entered in those Wise Men three, full reverently upon their knee, and offered there in His presence their gold,*

and myrrh, and frankincense. This verse describes how the Wise Men approached Jesus—with humility—and the gifts they presented: gold, symbolizing kingship and wealth, and signifying Jesus as a king; myrrh, a substance often used for embalming, foreshadowing Jesus' eventual sacrifice and death; and frankincense, which represented divinity and worship, and acknowledged Jesus as a divine being.

Verse five: *Then let us all with one accord sing praises to our heavenly Lord, that hath made heaven and earth of naught, and with His blood mankind hath bought.* The final verse invites all to join in praise and celebration of the divine Creator who, through the birth of Jesus, offers salvation to humanity. The mention of Christ's sacrifice, symbolized by "His blood," underscores the Christian belief in redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection.

And finally, the refrain: *Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel.* The repeated use of the word "Noel" celebrates the birth of the King of Israel, emphasizing the joyous nature of the occasion. It serves as a triumphant proclamation of the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah.

"The First Noel" encapsulates the essence of the Christmas story, weaving together the angelic proclamation to shepherds, the journey of the Wise Men guided by a star, and the profound significance of the birth of Jesus Christ. As we continue to embrace this timeless carol during the holiday season, we are reminded of the universal themes of hope, joy, and salvation that resonate across cultures and generations.