



NOEL Leader Guide

¡Feliz Navidad! Joyeux Noël! Fröhliche Weihnachten! Buon Natale!

NOTE TO LEADER: Christmas greetings in Spanish; French; German; Italian

Opening Prayer: “Welcome to earth, O noble Guest Through whom the sinful world is blest! You came to share my misery That You might share Your joy with me. [Come] see what God for us has done In sending us His own dear Son.”*^{8,6} Thank you, Lord. Amen.

“Noël” in French is both the word for Christmas and for carol, the songs and hymns of this special celebration that evoke so many memories and emotions. With a partner or small group, name a favorite carol of yours and describe why it is so.

EXAMPLE: A favorite of the author is “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Winter 2015), because of the rich lyrics describing our Redeemer and the haunting minor melody.

NOTE TO LEADER: *See hymn references below: ^{8,6} number of verse/s quoted.
Reading aloud together the hymn* verse quoted at the beginning of each section will both emphasize the message of the lyrics and encourage everyone to participate.

NOTE, TWO: Placing a marker in Luke 1 or 2 will help participants return more quickly to several additional passages.

Another way to think about NOËL is to consider what might have been the headline of that time — “Newborn Offers Eternal Life” — through the lens of a Christmas hymn.* “Come here, my friends, lift up your eyes, And see what in the manger lies. Who is this child, so young and fair? It is the Christ Child lying there.”⁷

NEWBORN: “To you this night is born a child Of Mary, chosen virgin mild; This little child of lowly birth Shall be the joy of all the earth.”² What do we learn about this Holy Infant in the following passages?

Isaiah 7:14 _____ The Lord Himself will give a sign: a son born of a virgin, called Immanuel.

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 9:6–7a _____ As prophesied, a child is given to us. His names of power and authority confirm His royalty. His kingdom will have no end.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.^{7a} Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom,

Luke 1:30–35 _____ Mary, who has found favor with God, will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, bear a son, and call Him Jesus. He will be great and reign over the house of Jacob forever. He will be called Holy, the Son of God (and in His human nature, the Son of Man).

³⁰ And the angel [Gabriel] said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵ And the

angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

Luke 2:1–7, 21 _____ A census brings to fulfillment the child's birth in Bethlehem, the city of David. He is wrapped in swaddling cloths laid in an humble manger [where He is visited by shepherds]. He is circumcised at the end of eight days and called Jesus, as Gabriel instructed.

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ²¹And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Describe the kinship Immanuel's followers have to newborns.

Matthew 21:14–16 _____ Whether it be child's or childlike, we are called through Baptism to a simple faith of being led and directed by God through Word and Sacrament. As the children here recognize the Messiah and praise Him, Jesus quotes His forebear's Psalm 8, verse 2. Son of David is indeed a majestic name!

¹⁴And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?'"

Luke 18:15–17 _____ We are to welcome and encourage the young and young in faith, praying for them and providing a good example. "The kingdom of God comes to all who humbly trust the Lord, no matter what their age or status." and "Children have to trust and receive the care of others, and only in the same way does the kingdom of God come to us." (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, page 1754)

¹⁵Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

Hebrews 5:12–6:1a _____ As we mature in faith and in experience in studying God's Word, we are able to move from basic beliefs to more challenging passages of Scripture (growing from the "milk" of infants toward "solid food") and their application to life's issues.

5 ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

6 ^{1a}Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity,

1 Peter 2:1–3 _____ We are to hunger for God's nourishing Word as a newborn longs for a mother's milk. The Gospel satisfies deep needs and equips us to cope with life. "Now through His Word, He calls us to life and sets us apart to His glory and for the service of our neighbor. God shows us our value: He was willing to send His Son to us. Now He calls us to share the Savior with others" (*TLSB*, page 2151).

¹So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ²Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

OFFERS: “This is the Christ, our God Most High, Who hears your sad and bitter cry; He will Himself your Savior be From all your sins to set you free.”³ How do we have absolute trust in the new covenant?

Jeremiah 31:33–34 _____ We know that God does not lie and that He keeps his promises. In offering this new covenant, God offers the promise of the Gospel — forgiveness in Christ — which penetrates our sinful hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word and bringing us to faith in Jesus. (See also 1 John 3:23–24.) The new covenant, fulfilled by Jesus’ death on the cross — God Himself providing the blood sacrifice of His only Son!

— and Jesus’ resurrection, offers believers in Christ a new and right relationship based on grace and faith. He is our God and we are His people.

³³ For this is the [new] covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Luke 2:27–32 _____ Brought into the temple by His parents, the child Jesus is recognized by Simeon (in the Spirit) as the Lord’s Christ. Salvation for all people — Israel and Gentiles — will be realized through this child, Messiah.

²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he [Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

NOTE TO LEADER: In verses 36–38, the prophetess Anna joins in thanks for this Redeemer; 46–52, the 12-year-old Son is in the temple in Jerusalem and refers to it as “my Father’s house.”

Acts 4:10–12 _____ Peter testifies that there is salvation in no one else; there is no other name under heaven than Jesus Christ of Nazareth — who was crucified and whom God raised from the dead — by which we must be saved.

[Peter said to the rulers and elders:] ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead— by him this [crippled] man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Galatians 4:4–7 _____ Paul writes that, at the right time, God sent His Son to redeem those under the law. Through faith, we receive adoption as children of God and the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. We become heirs of the promise to Abraham.

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

ETERNAL: “He will on you the gifts bestow Prepared by God for all below, That in His kingdom, bright and fair, You may with us His glory share.”⁴ List the gifts mentioned in these references.

Matthew 18:1–4 _____ Faith and the kingdom of God are gifts of grace to all ages and abilities. Just as a child exhibits dependence and trust, we are to practice humility: confessing that we can do nothing at all to become worthy before God and depending entirely on His mercy for forgiveness through our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

²And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 1:68–70, 76–79 _____ **Zechariah confirms that the Lord has redeemed His people as prophesied in the new covenant. John the Baptist will prepare the way, giving knowledge of salvation through Jesus because of God's mercy and forgiveness of sins. Grace, forgiveness, salvation, and faith guide our feet into the way of peace and everlasting life.**

[Zechariah prophesied:] ⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷⁶And you, child [John the Baptist], will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Romans 8:1–4, 16–17a _____ **Jesus has given us His Holy Spirit. Walking according to the Spirit, we have: freedom from the law of sin and death; the privilege of being children of God and co-heirs; and, the assurance that God loves us in Christ.**

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ^{17a}and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,

Hebrews 9:11–15a _____ **Through the shedding of His own blood, Jesus — Who was without sin — offered Himself as the sacrifice for an eternal redemption. He took the punishment for our sins, reconciling to the Father those who believe in the Son — the mediator of the new covenant which promises an eternal inheritance.**

¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ^{15a}Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance,

LIFE: "Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, Prepare a bed, soft, undefiled, A quiet chamber set apart For You to dwell within my heart."¹³ How are these gifts revealed in a believer's life?

Mark 14:22–24; 16:15–16a _____ **Jesus — our Sacrificial Lamb Who fulfills the new covenant — institutes the Lord's Supper, giving His true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, which we receive spiritually and physically in the Sacrament. Faith, through the Word and Holy Baptism, leads us to offer the Gospel invitation to all people.**

¹⁴ ²²And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ¹⁶ ¹⁵And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. ^{16a}Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,

John 1:1–4, 11–14, 16–17 _____ **The pre-existent Word became flesh and dwelt among us, offering believers in His name grace, truth, and life — and the right to become children of God. Note: In verses 6–8 and 15, John confirms John the Baptist's witness to the incarnate Word.**

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 13:11–12 _____ Mind and body, thoughts and reason are designed to mature from childhood to adult. Yet we realize that, for now, we know about God. We look forward to heaven when, in God's presence, we will know God, *i.e.*, have personal experience face to face.

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 John 3:1–2, 11 _____ God's grace and love are lavished upon us, to the point that He calls us His own children now, and we have eternal life now. When He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. The message from the beginning is to love one another.

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ¹¹For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Jude 20–21 _____ Building ourselves up through study of the Word, prayer, Divine Service and Communion keep us in the love of God as we wait for the mercy of the Lord Jesus that leads to eternal life.

²⁰But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Reflection: Promised virgin's son, David's heir, mediator of the new covenant, Jesus is not ashamed to call His faithful ones His children (Hebrews 2:13). Like newborn babes, we depend on, learn from, and cling to the Eternal Word. Founder of our salvation, the Son of God was — and always is — with us: our Noël, our Immanuel.

As Time Allows: Read Luke 1–3 and/or Matthew 1–2. List additional information about the birth of the Holy Child. Draw as many connections as you can between references.

Closing Prayer: “My heart for very joy must leap; My lips no more can silence keep. I, too, must sing with joyful tongue That sweetest ancient cradlesong: Glory to God in highest heav’n, Who unto us His Son has giv’n!”^{14–15} Amen.

Closing Hymn: Sing or say together one or more of the verses of the quoted hymn, “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come” (*LSB* 358; *LW* 37; *TLH* 85).

**LSB* 358, verses 8, 6, 7, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15 (hymn based on Luke 2:10-20)