

# Christmas Carols



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# First Noel

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- This is actually an English song dating back to the sixteenth century.
- Some people think it was French because of the spelling of Noel.
- It was first published in 1833 when it appeared in, *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*.
- The first line suggests a December date for the birth of Christ:
- “The first Noel, the angels 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.”



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# First Noel

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- Although many doubt that Jesus was born in December, there are some theologians who believe that a December date is possible.
- Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, suggests December of 5 B.C. or January of 4 B.C.
- Whatever the case may be about the date of the birth of Jesus, the song continues: “Born is the King of Israel!”
- It reminds us that a king was born that night. Yet few understood the significance of a birth in Bethlehem.



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# First Noel

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- Even the wise men from the East did not completely understand the significance of His birth, but were guided to Him by a star.
- “For all to see there was 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 song goes on to say that “three wise men came from country far.”
- The Bible does not tell us how many wise men there were. We know there were three kinds of gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh), but we don’t know how many wise men there were.



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# First Noel

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- Some church fathers says there were twelve.
- Other traditions name three: Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar.
- The Bible does teach that Jesus was born and that He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

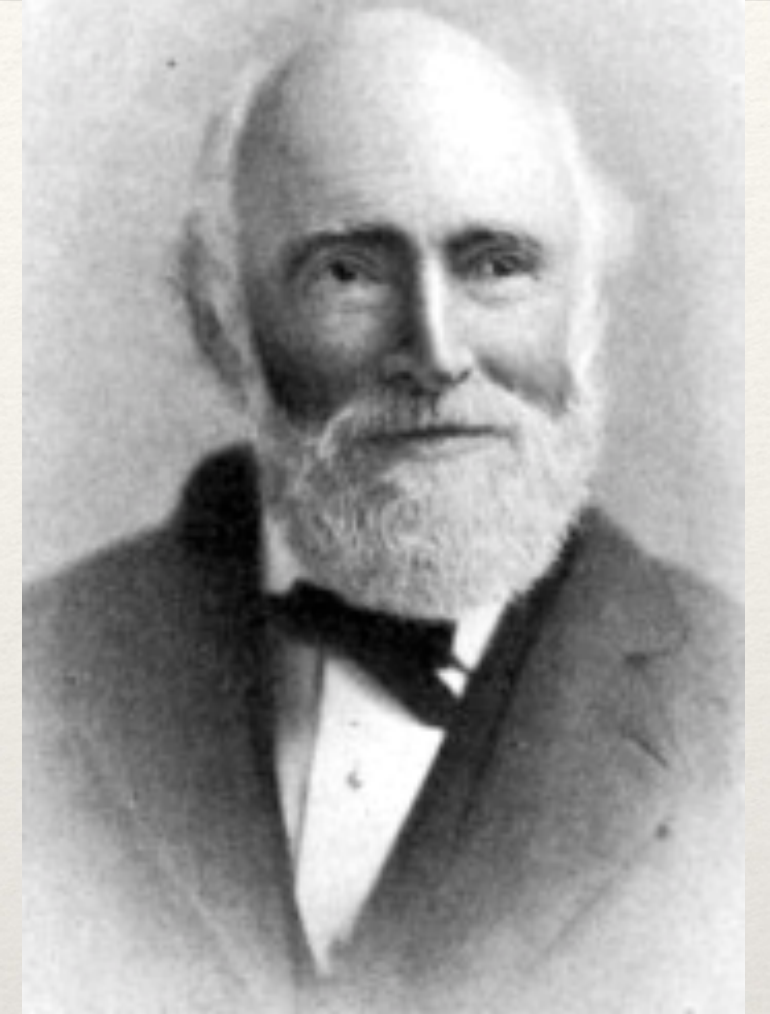


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# O Holy Night

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- “O Holy Night” was originally composed in French as “Cantique de Noël.”
- It was translated into English by John Sullivan Dwight.
- It was first performed in 1847.
- “O holy night! The stars are brightly shining. It is the night of the dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”
- The coming of Christ makes us feel valuable, and makes us feel loved.





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# O Holy Night

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- Perhaps the most quoted verse in the Bible is John 3:16.
- It tells us that Jesus came because “God so loved the world.”
- He came so that our souls would feel their worth to God.
- 1 Peter 1 reminds us that God actually purchased us out of slavery to sin.
- He did this not with something perishable (like gold and silver), but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).



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# O Holy Night

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- “The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger, In all our trials born to be our Friend. He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger. Behold your King, before Him lowly bend.”
- The King of kings was born as a human infant and placed in a manger.
- Christ was born in a stable and lived a life of poverty.
- He also experienced temptation and persecution. He died a horrible death on the cross abandoned by his friends.
- He can relate to our experiences.



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# O Holy Night

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- “Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace. Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, And in His name all oppression shall cease.”
- We no longer have slavery in this country, but many people are still enslaved to various forms of sin and need Jesus as their Savior.
- We as believers are to model the humility that Jesus demonstrated when He stepped out of eternity into time and gave up His rights as God.
- Paul admonishes us to model humility in our walk (Philippians 2:3-4).



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# I Heard the Bells

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- This song came at the end of tragedy that struck Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
- In 1861, two years before writing this poem, his life was shaken when his wife was fatally burned in a fire.
- Her dress caught on fire, and he tried to extinguish the flames as best he could with first a rug, then his body.
- She died the next morning, and his facial burns were so severe he couldn't even attend her funeral.



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# I Heard the Bells

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- He grew a beard to cover his burns, and often feared he would be committed to an asylum due to his grief.
- His oldest son Charles joined the Union Army without his father's blessing.
- After the Battle of Chancellorsville, he fell ill with typhoid fever and was sent home to recover.
- He missed fighting at the Battle of Gettysburg (1863) but was able to rejoin his unit.



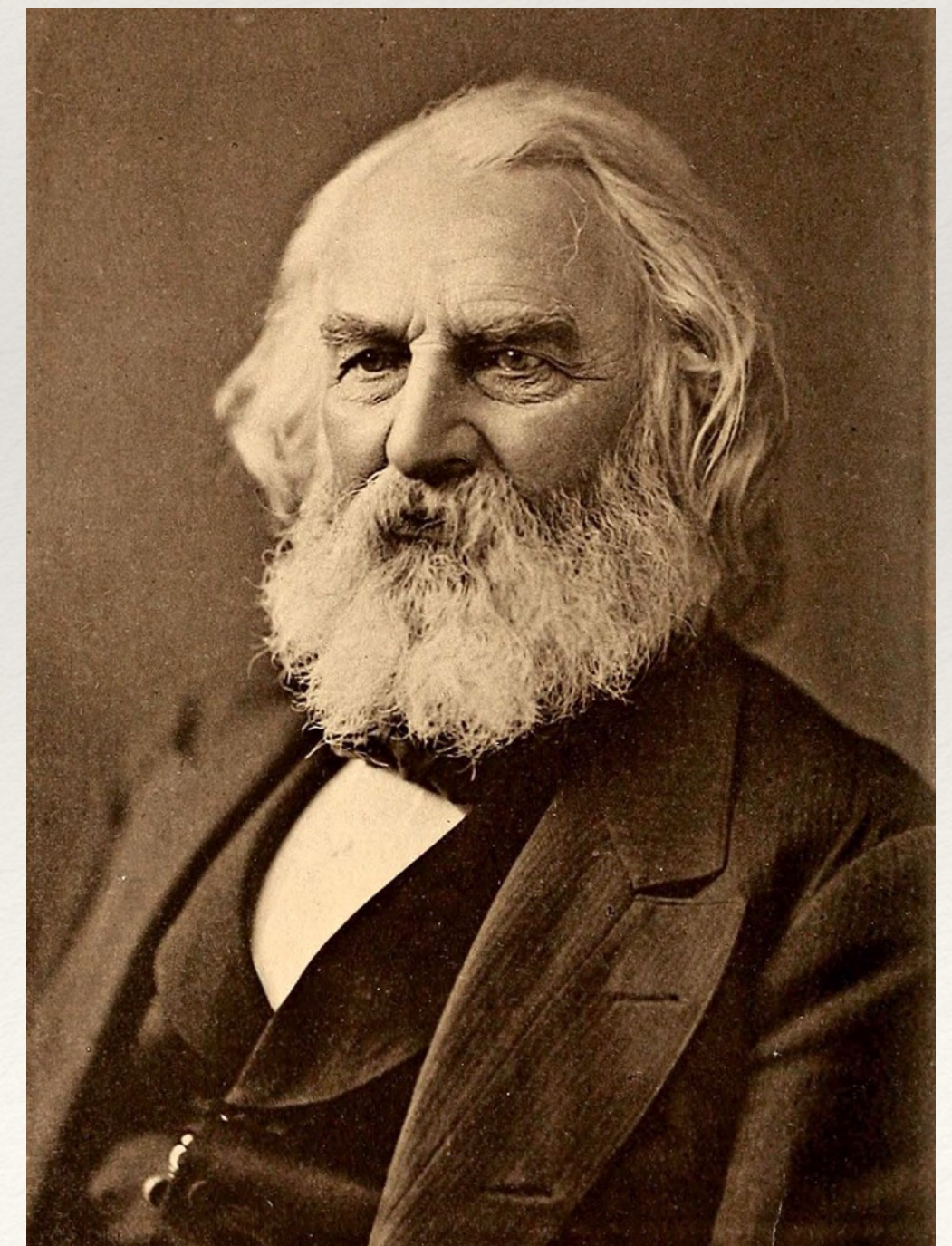


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# I Heard the Bells

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- Longfellow received a telegram that his son had been severely wounded at the Battle of New Hope Church, Virginia. He was nearly paralyzed.
- Longfellow, a widowed father of six children, the oldest nearly paralyzed, reflected not only on his grief but a country fighting a war against itself.
- He wrote a poem to capture the dissonance in his own heart and the world around him, as he heard the Christmas bells.
- There is hope even in the midst of bleak despair.





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# Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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- Charles Wesley wrote over 6500 hymns.
- His best-known hymn is “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.”
- Over the years it has been edited slightly, but the meaning and theology remains as he wrote it more than two centuries ago.
- It begins with a proclamation of the birth of Jesus:
- “Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King,”
- “Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.”





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# Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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- The hymn reminds us why Christ came to earth.
- Jesus came into the world to bring peace, but many who sing this song fail to realize that it was to bring peace between us and God.
- Wesley's hymn reminds us that His birth was so that God and sinners would be reconciled.
- We are the sinners in this hymn: for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
- All we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6).



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# Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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- We have broken God's commandments and need to be reconciled with God.
- This was done (we were reconciled) when Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3).
- The hymn then describes who Jesus Christ is:
- "Christ by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the Virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel."



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# Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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- This is the wonder of the Incarnation.
- Jesus (the second person of the Trinity) became the “offspring of the Virgin’s womb.”
- God became man and was “veiled in flesh” even though He was the “incarnate Deity.”
- Jesus was our Emmanuel. The name Emmanuel means “God with us.” Even though Jesus became man, he did not lose His deity.



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# Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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- This is what Jesus did for us:
- “Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.”
- He laid aside His own rights, coming to this earth to die for our sins.



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# Angels We Have Heard on High

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- This is an 18th century traditional French carol “Les Anges dans nos Campagnes.” It originally had the title “Harken All! What Holy Singing!”
- It was based on Luke 2:14 in which the angels say: “Glory to the God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”
- The hymn also has the refrain that tells us what the angels said: “Gloria, in excelsis Deo” which means “Glory to God in the highest!”
- As the vast number of angels descended toward earth, they were directed to the humble shepherds by God.



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# Angels We Have Heard on High

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- The Bible reports that the shepherds were terrified. Each one covered his face.
- But they listened with awe to the angel in his blinding light - “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”
- Here was the long-awaited Savior for Israel who was born that night in Bethlehem announced by the angels (God’s ministering spirits and messengers to human beings).

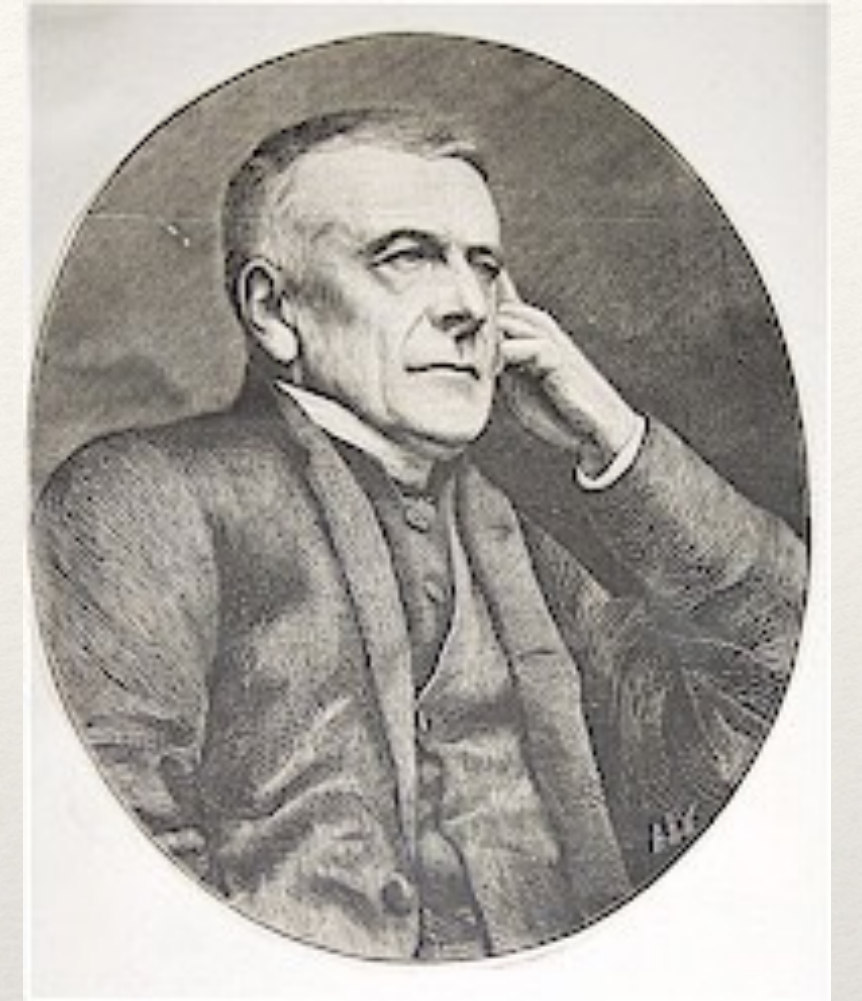


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# Oh Come All Ye Faithful

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- This is an 18th century Latin hymn written by John Francis Wade that was translated by Frederick Oakeley.
- It was first used in Catholic churches as “Adeste Fidelis, Laeti triumphantes” before Protestant churches used it.
- It is one of the most translated carols.





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# Oh Come All Ye Faithful

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- The first stanza pictures the exalted song of the angelic choir heard by the shepherds: “O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.”
- Luke 2:15-20 tells us that the shepherds immediately came to see the baby Jesus.
- The final verse offers praise and adoration to the Word (the Lord) who was with the Father from the beginning.
- “Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be all glory given. Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.”



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# O Little Town of Bethlehem

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- Phillips Brooks, an Episcopal pastor from Philadelphia wrote “O Little Town of Bethlehem” in 1867.
- During a trip to Holy Land, he was moved by the experience.
- He rode by horseback from Jerusalem to attend a 5-hour Christmas Eve service at the Church of the Nativity.
- While at Philadelphia’s Holy Trinity Church, he decided to compose an original Christmas hymn for the children to sing during their annual program.





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# O Little Town of Bethlehem

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- Then he asked his organist, Lewis Rednor, to write the music for his poem.
- He wrote about what it must have been like in Bethlehem the night of Christ's birth:
- "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light; The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."



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# O Little Town of Bethlehem

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- While the streets of our cities are quiet on Christmas day, most likely that day was just like any other day for the people in Bethlehem.
- But as evening came, the town grew quiet and something remarkable took place.
- The second verse the hymn says, “While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.”
- This is just like today. Our world goes about its business, usually oblivious to the spiritual realities around it.



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# O Little Town of Bethlehem

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- “How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.”
- When Christ came into the world, He came quietly.
- The angelic announcement was the only public announcement at His birth.
- And He was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough.



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# O Little Town of Bethlehem

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- “O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us we pray, Cast out our sin, and enter it; be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel.”
- Christ came to “cast out our sin” so we can abide with him “our Emmanuel.”

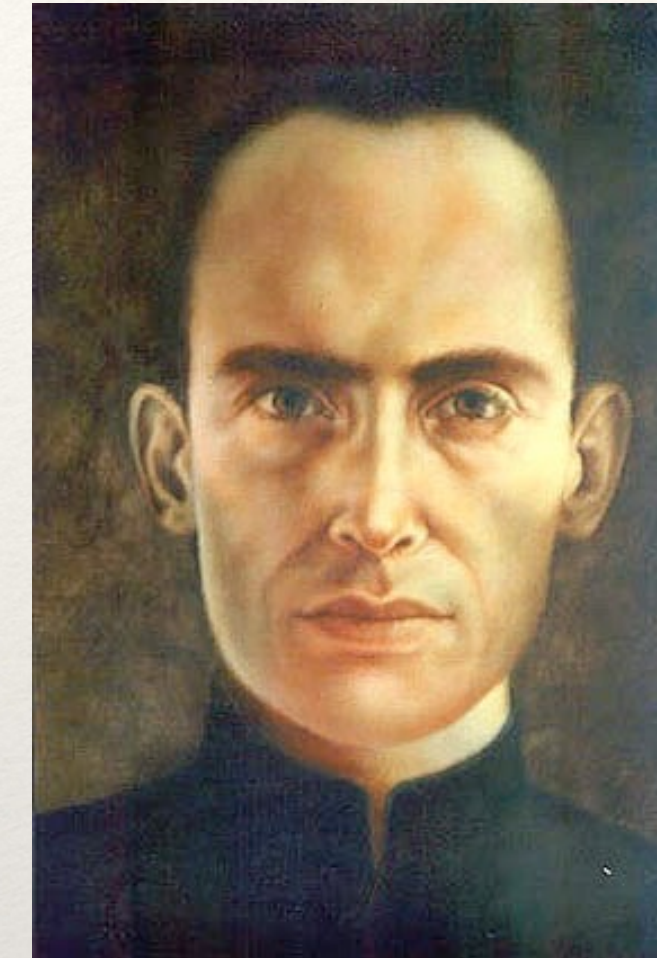


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# Silent Night

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- This hymn was written by two church leaders for their own mountain village parishioners.
- Joseph Mohr wrote it and Franze Gruber set it to music though the church organ would not function.
- “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright  
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,  
Holy Infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.”





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# Silent Night

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- It was a quiet night, except for the announcement by the angels.
- It was also a holy night that changed history.
- “Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight; glories stream from heaven afar; heavenly hosts sing alleluia-Christ the Savior is born!”
- While the shepherds were afraid, they also heard the good news that a Savior for the world was born that day.



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# Joy to the World

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- Isaac Watts is known as the “Father of English Hymnology.”
- He wrote “Joy to the World” in 1719 and was originally titled “The Messiah’s Coming and Kingdom.”
- The original title illustrates why there is no reference to angels, shepherds, or wise men.
- It is really about Christ’s second coming.
- We of course sing it at Christmas time about Christ’s first coming.





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# Joy to the World

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- The hymn is a paraphrase of Psalm 98: “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praise.”
- It then answers why: “for He [the Lord] comes to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness, and the people with equity.”
- The Psalm was originally a song of rejoicing for the Lord’s protection of His chosen people.
- Isaac Watts used it as an expression of praise. Remember what the angel said to the shepherds: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy.”



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# Joy to the World

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- The hymn proclaims that the earth should “receive her King” and every heart should “prepare Him room.”
- That has not happened yet, but there will be a time when as the hymn says “the Savior reigns.”
- “No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.”
- Genesis 3:18 - God says thorns and thistles will spring forth from the ground.
- New Heaven and Earth - curse will be gone.



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# Joy to the World

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- Christ will also come as Judge and Ruler.
- The hymn proclaims that: “He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love.”
- Christ rules the world and is coming again.