

Christmas Carols & Carol Singing



Helen Yeomans

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Introduction

Do you like singing Christmas carols? Listening to others sing them? Learning their history?

You'll find dozens of carols here: traditional carols, hymn classics, carols from the new world (America, Canada and the Caribbean) and modern Christmas songs. Learn about the saints and sinners, the ministers, bankers, realtors and insurance brokers, who actually wrote our favorite Christmas carols and hymns, and the events that inspired them.

Each carol has its own page with the words, origin and history, and tune name or composer. Many older carols are sung to several tunes.

Traditional Christmas Carols

These are the Christmas folk songs that have simply evolved over the centuries. It's hard to believe today, but at one time not so long ago, these traditional Christmas carols were in danger of dying out completely. The credit for preserving them goes to just a few individuals and their carol collections.

William Sandys is one of the earliest: in 1833 he collected and published *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*. Later on in the 19th century came W.H. Husk's *Songs of the Nativity* (1868) and Bramley & Stainer's *Christmas Carols New and Old* (1871). Finally, 1928 marked the publication of the influential *Oxford Book of Carols* (OBC), edited by Percy Dearmer, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Martin Shaw.



This woodcut illustrating "The Holly and the Ivy" is reproduced from Bramley & Stainer's *Christmas Carols New and Old*.

What's the difference between a hymn and a carol? The OBC defines carols as "songs with a religious impulse that are simple, hilarious, popular and modern." Another definition: a carol is "a popular song relating to a specific season of the year."

Traditional Christmas carols you'll find in this collection:

Angels We Have Heard on High
Christmas is Coming
The First Nowell
God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen
Here We Come A-Wassailing

O Come O Come Emmanuel
Past Three O'Clock
Patapan
Rocking
The Seven Joys of Mary

The Holly and the Ivy
I Saw Three Ships
O Christmas Tree

The Twelve Days of Christmas
Unto Us a Boy is Born
We Wish You A Merry Christmas

Classic Hymns and Carols

The classic Christmas hymns and carols have authors other than Anon. Written mostly during the 18th and 19th centuries, their creators were preachers, composers, scholars—even an insurance broker. They include the great hymn writers, people like Isaac Watts (a Congregationalist), Charles Wesley (a Methodist), and James Montgomery (an Anglican).

What's the difference between a hymn and a carol? Some experts would say that hymns are carols for adults. On this basis, “Once in Royal David's City” and “Silent Night,” for example, are carols.

Angels from the Realms of Glory
As With Gladness
Christians, Awake
Ding Dong! Merrily on High
Good Christian Men, Rejoice
Good King Wenceslas
Hark! the Herald Angels Sing
In the Bleak Midwinter
Joy to the World

O Come, All Ye Faithful
See Amid the Winter's Snow
Silent Night
O Holy Night
Once in Royal David's City
What Child is This?
While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks
Up! Good Christen Folk, and Listen

New World Hymns and Carols

The Christmas hymns and carols in this section come from the the New World: America, Canada or the Caribbean. Their sources are diverse, ranging from native indian chants, negro spirituals and gospel songs to hymns by ministers, poets, bankers and realtors.

We tend to think of the 20th century as being the era of American carols and songs (“White Christmas,” “Rudolf,” “Sleigh Ride,” “Winter Wonderland”). But in fact the huge American contribution to our wealth of popular Christmas music began in the 19th century.

Away in a Manger
Carol of the Bells
Deck the Hall
Go Tell It on the Mountain

Jingle Bells
Jolly Old Saint Nicholas
O Little Town of Bethlehem
O Mary, Where is Your Baby?

The Huron Carol
I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
I Wonder as I Wander

The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy
Up on the House-top
We Three Kings of Orient Are

Modern Christmas Songs

Dating from the 1930s onward, these are the copyrighted contemporary songs of Christmas. Write a good Christmas song and you can quit your day job. One of the reasons *The Christmas Carol Handbook* was so popular, I believe, was that its 51 carols included 16 of the popular modern songs.

Some Christmas songs are solemn; others, like "Six White Boomers" are funny. Read the history behind each carol to discover the events that inspired them.

Blue Christmas
Christmas in Killarney
Frosty the Snowman
Here Comes Santa Claus
A Holly Jolly Christmas
Jingle Bell Rock
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

The Little Drummer Boy
Mary's Boy Child
Old Toy Trains
Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
Six White Boomers
Sleigh Ride
Winter Wonderland

About this Collection

Some years ago, in the course of putting together a selection of carols for my annual carol party I began exploring the world of Christmas carols. That led to the publication of *The Christmas Carol Handbook*. It included the words to 51 carols (including 16 modern copyrighted songs) and the stories behind them. It suited those who love singing carols as well as those who just enjoy reading about them, and it sold nearly ten thousand copies.

The Handbook was the starting point for a carol website, which enabled me to link to midi files of all the tunes associated with different carols. I can no longer do that in this format, but I've also kept the references to multiple tunes. Many carols are associated with different tunes in England or Canada than in the U.S. See "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear," or "While Shepherds Watch" for examples. You can search on these tune names to find the one you prefer.

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Words: James Montgomery, 1816
Music: "Regent Square," by Henry Smart, 1867
"Iris," French carol melody arranged by Martin Shaw, 1928



As editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, James Montgomery (1771-1854) was imprisoned twice for his writings on social issues. However, poetry was his first love and he wrote some 400 hymns, many of which are still sung today.

"Angels" was written on December 23, 1816, and published in the Christmas Eve edition of the *Iris*. For those who are neither angels, shepherds, sages nor saints, Montgomery wrote a fifth verse ("Sinners..."), but this seldom appeared in later printings; instead, a verse from another carol was substituted.

The tunes associated with "Angels" are quite dissimilar. The stately "Regent Square" is the more common in the United States, while "Iris," adapted from the old French carol "Les anges dans nos campagnes," is the customary choice in England. Canadians are probably familiar with both.

James Montgomery was also instrumental in popularizing *Christians Awake*.

Angels from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new-born King.

Shepherds in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night;
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant light:

Refrain:

Sages, leave your contemplations;
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen his natal star:

Refrain:

Saints before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In his temple shall appear:

Refrain:

Though an infant now we view him,
He shall fill his Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to him;
Every knee shall then bow down:

Refrain:

Angels We Have Heard on High (*Les Anges dans Nos Campagnes*)

Words: Traditional French carol

Music: "Iris"



Confusion sometimes arises between "Angels We Have Heard on High" and James Montgomery's hymn, "[Angels from the Realms of Glory](#)," perhaps because the later hymn was originally set to this carol's tune.

The Anglican Church Hymn Book (1938) adds to the confusion. It provides the carol "Shepherds in the Field Abiding" to the same tune, yet retains the nifty refrain. It's all most confusing. Let's move on.

The carol probably evolved in France much as "The First Nowell" did in England. Same subject matter, much different treatment.

"Angels We Have Heard on High" is fun for carollers of all ages.

Angels we have heard on high,
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous songs prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be
Which inspire your heav'nly song?
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem, and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ, the Lord, our new-born King.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.



As With Gladness

Words: William Chatterton Dix, 1859

Music: "Dix," Conrad Kocher, 1838



An insurance broker who translated Greek and Ethiopian hymns, William Chatterton Dix (1837-98) was ill for prolonged periods in his twenties, and it was then that "As With Gladness" was written. It was a reaction to the many myths surrounding the wise men and their gifts, and came to him, appropriately, on January 6 (Epiphany). As Dix saw it, what mattered was that people (never mind their rank) came with gladness.

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped,
To that lowly manger bed,
There to bend the knee before
Him whom heaven and earth adore;
So may we with willing feet
Ever seek thy mercy-seat.

As they offered gifts most rare
At that manger rude and bare;
So may we with holy joy,
Pure and free from sin's alloy,
All our costliest treasures bring,
Christ, to thee, our heavenly King.

Away in a Manger

Words: Anonymous, of American origin, 1885
"Mueller," by James R. Murray, 1887
Music: "Cradle Song," by W.J. Kirkpatrick, late 19th century
"Afton," by J.E. Spilman



Often attributed to Martin Luther, this carol's American origins were established in *Not So Far Away in a Manger* by Richard Hill.

The first two verses appeared in 1885 in *A Little Children's Book for Schools and Families*, published by the Lutheran Church in North America. In 1887, James R. Murray (1838-1921) printed the words with the tune "Mueller," which is attributed to him. "Cradle Song" is by another American, W.H. Kirkpatrick (1838-1921).

The carol is also sung to the Scottish air, "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton." Here, however, there seem to be two tunes: Spilman's "Afton" and/or "Afton Water" by Alexander Hume.

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky,
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
Close by me for ever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with thee there.

Christians, Awake

Words: John Byrum, 1749

Music: "Yorkshire," by John Wainwright, 1750



For many years, John Byrum (1692-1763) made a living teaching his patented shorthand; two pupils were his friends John and Charles Wesley. Byrum wrote "Christians Awake" for his daughter, Dolly, and set to Wainwright's melody it achieved immediate popularity with carollers.

"Christians Awake" wasn't published until 1819, when the original poem of 46 lines (in longhand) was arranged by James Montgomery into six verses of six lines each. Even at this reduced length, it is still, by my estimate, the longest carol ever written, and Montgomery's version seldom appears today.

Carol singing note: If you're the music maker at your carol party, you'll want to keep the tune moving briskly along to avert mutiny. It's not that the carol is unpleasing, but you can have too much of a good thing.

"The First Nowell" is another long carol; you might want to space the two well apart over the evening.

Christians, awake, salute the happy morn,
Whereon the Savior of the world was born;
Rise to adore the mystery of love,
Which hosts of angels chanted from above;
With them the joyful tidings first begun
Of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.

Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
Who heard th' angelic herald's voice, "Behold,
I bring good tidings of a savior's birth
To you and all the nations of the earth;
This day hath God fulfilled his promised word,
This day is born a savior, Christ the Lord.

He spake; and straightway the celestial choir
In hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire.
The praises of redeeming love they sang,
And heaven's whole orb with alleluias rang;
God's highest glory was their anthem still,
Peace on the earth and unto men good will.

To Beth'hem straight the enlightened shepherds ran,
To see the wonder God had wrought for man.
Then to their flocks, still praising God, return,
And their glad hearts with holy rapture burn,
Let us like these good shepherds then employ
Our grateful voices to proclaim the joy.

Christmas is Coming

Words: Traditional English round, 17th-19th century



The music for "Christmas is Coming" may have been written by Edith Bland (1858-1924), better known as E. Nesbit, author of *The Railway Children*. The carol works well if you sing it as a round (like "Row row row your boat" or "[Up on the Housetop](#)").

Rounds have been around (sorry) since the 13th century in England. According to the [Timelines of Trends in Music](#), the earliest known round is the English song "Summer is icumen in" (1225).

Here's some info that will stun your friends and impress the neighbours: a round where the voices enter at different pitches is called a *canon*, and one with a bit more complexity is called a *fugue*.

Well it stunned mine.

Christmas is coming,
The goose is getting fat,
Please put a penny in the old man's hat.
If you haven't got a penny a ha'penny will do,
If you haven't got a ha'penny, then God bless you!

The Little Drummer Boy

**Words &
Music:**

Harry Simeone, Henry Onorati and Katherine Davis, 1958



"Drummer Boy" first appeared on the Harry Simeone Chorale's album, *Sing We Now of Christmas*, in 1958. Owing to the enormous popularity of the song the album was renamed with that title in subsequent pressings and sold more than 11 million copies in the short space of 7 years, making it the most successful Christmas album ever. The single itself was issued first in 1959, and as of the end of 1970 had sold 25 million copies in various versions

Come, they told me (pa rum pum pum pum)
A new born King to see, pa rum pum pum pum
Our finest gifts we bring, pa rum pum pum pum
To lay before the King, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,
So to honor Him, pa rum pum pum pum,
When we come.

Little Baby, pa rum pum pum pum
I am a poor boy too, pa rum pum pum pum
I have no gift to bring, pa rum pum pum pum
That's fit to give the King, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,
Shall I play for you, pa rum pum pum pum,
On my drum?

Mary nodded, pa rum pum pum pum
The ox and lamb kept time, pa rum pum pum pum
I played my drum for Him, pa rum pum pum pum
I played my best for Him, pa rum pum pum pum,
rum pum pum pum, rum pum pum pum,
Then He smiled at me, pa rum pum pum pum
Me and my drum.

Jingle Bells

**Words &
Music:**

James S. Pierpont, 1857



James Pierpont (1822-93) was the son of a noted Boston preacher, an abolitionist with socialist leanings, who opposed the individual accumulation of wealth. Pierpont was also the uncle of financier J.P. Morgan. Family gatherings *chez Pierpont* must have been fairly combustible.

Originally published in 1857 under the title "The One-Horse Open Sleigh," this is today the quintessential Christmas song. Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters made a sprightly recording of it in 1943; it became Crosby's eighth million-selling record.

Dashing through the snow
In a one-horse open sleigh,
O'er the fields we go,
Laughing all the way;
Bells on bob-tail ring;
Making spirits bright;
What fun it is to ride and sing
A sleighing-song tonight!

Jingle bells! jingle bells!
Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh!
Jingle bells! jingle bells!
Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh!

Deck the Hall

Words: Anonymous

Music: Traditional Welsh air, probably of American origin



These words first appeared in print in 1881, in *The Franklin Square Song Collection*. But the tune may go back as far as the 16th century. It was included in the *Oxford Book of Carols* (1928) with the carol "Now the Joyful Bells a' Ringing," but today, the words and tune of "Deck the Hall" are inseparable.

Deck the hall with boughs of holly,

Fa la la la la la la la.

'Tis the season to be jolly,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Don we now our gay apparel,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol,

Fa la la la la la la la.

See the blazing Yule before us,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Strike the harp and join the chorus,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Follow me in merry measure,

Fa la la la la la la la.

While I tell of Yuletide treasure,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Fast away the old year passes,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Hail the new, ye lads and lasses,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Sing we joyous all together,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Heedless of the wind and weather,

Fa la la la la la la la.

Ding Dong! Merrily on High

Words: G.R. Woodward

Music: "Branle de l'official," 16th century French tune harmonized by Charles Wood



In the second verse, "i-o"-- meaning "joy"-- is pronounced "ee-o."

Woodward (1848-1934) and Wood (1866-1926) also collaborated on "Past Three O'Clock," and on the second edition of *The Cowley Carol Book* (1902). Woodward was an Anglican rector who wrote several hymns and also produced a new edition in 1910 of *Piae Cantiones*.

The tune appeared in a treatise on dancing, *Orchésographie*, in 1588.

Ding dong! merrily on high
In heav'n the bells are ringing:
Ding dong! verily the sky
Is riv'n with angel singing.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so here below below,
Let steeple bells be swungen,
And i-o, i-o, i-o,
By priest and people sungen.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Pray you, dutifully prime
Your matin chime, ye ringers;
May you beautifully rhyme
Yyour evetime song, ye singers.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Up! Good Christen Folk, and Listen (*Ding-dong Ding!*)

Words: Rev. G.R. Woodward
Music: "O quam mundum" from *Piae Cantiones*



This is one of the 69 carols from the *Cowley Carol Book* (second edition, 1902). Woodward wrote the words and provided a harmony for the melody.

Latin lines in the refrain:
Ex maria Virgine (of the Virgin Mary); *Christus natus hodie* (Christ is born today)

Carol singing note:
You don't have to repeat the opening lines at the end, but I think it makes a nice finish.

Ding-dong, ding!
Ding-a-dong-a-ding!
Ding-dong, ding-dong,
Ding-a-dong-ding!

Up! good Christen folk, and listen
How the merry church bells ring,
And from steeple, Bid good people
Come adore the new-born King:

Refrain:
Born of mother, blest o'er other,
Ex Maria Virgine,
In a stable ('Tis no fable),
Christus natus hodie.

Tell the story how from glory
God came down at Christmastide,
Bringing gladness, Chasing sadness,
Show'ring blessings far and wide.

Refrain:

Ding-dong, ding!
Ding-a-dong-a-ding!
Ding-dong, ding-dong,
Ding-a-dong-ding!

Frosty the Snowman

Words:

Music:



Frosty the snowman was a jolly happy soul,
With a corn cob pipe and a button nose, and two eyes made
out of coal.

Frosty the snowman is a fairy tale, they say,
He was made of snow but the children know how he came
to life one day.

There must have been some magic in that old silk hat they
found,
For when they placed it on his head, he began to dance
around.

Oh, Frosty the snowman was alive as he could be,
And the children say he could laugh and play just the same
as you and me.

Thumpety thump thump, thumpety thump thump,
Look at Frosty go.
Thumpety thump thump, thumpety thump thump,
Over the hills of snow.

Frosty the snowman knew the sun was hot that day,
So he said, "Let's run and we'll have some fun now before I
melt away."

Down to the village, with a broomstick in his hand,
Running here and there all around the square sayin', "Catch
me if you can."

He led them down the streets of town right to the traffic
cop.

And he only paused a moment when he heard him holler
"Stop!"

For Frosty the snowman had to hurry on his way,
But he waved goodbye sayin', "Don't you cry, I'll be back
again some day."

Thumpety thump thump, thumpety thump thump,
Look at Frosty go.
Thumpety thump thump, thumpety thump thump,
Over the hills of snow.

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Words: Traditional spiritual

Music:



Probably dating from the late 19th century, this spiritual appeared in a 1909 collection, *Religious Songs of the Negro as Sung on the Plantations*, edited by Thomas P. Fenner.

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.

The shepherds feared and trembled
When lo! above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth:

Chorus:

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.

When I was a seeker,
I sought both night and day,
I ask the Lord to help me,
And he show me the way:

Chorus:

He made me a watchman
Upon a city wall,
And if I am a Christian
I am the least of all:

Chorus:

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

Words &
Music:

Traditional English carol, c. 1770



"God keep you merry" is the meaning of the title.

This version is taken substantially from William Sandys' *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*, published in 1833.

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior
Was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray:

Refrain:

O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

In Bethlehem, in Jewry,
This blessed babe was born,
And laid within a manger,
Upon this blessed morn;
The which his mother Mary,
Did nothing take in scorn:

Refrain:

From God our heavenly Father
A blessed angel came,
And unto certain shepherds
Brought tidings of the same,
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by name:

Refrain:

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All others doth deface:

Refrain:

Good Christian Men, Rejoice

Words: John Mason Neale, 1853

Music: "In Dulce Jubilo," *Piae Cantiones*, 1582



The Rev. John Mason Neale (1818-66) was a brilliant translator of both Latin and Greek hymns. His most memorable Christmas contributions are two carols inspired by a 16th century collection of medieval Finnish songs, *Piae Cantiones*, a copy of which was given to him in the early 1850s.

"In Dulce Jubilo" was a 14th century German carol whose tune was also found in that collection. With its combination of Latin and German lines, it was an example of "macaronic" carols, those mixing Latin with the vernacular.

Rather than translating the original ("*In dulci jubilo*/Now sing with hearts aglow") Neale paraphrased the original carol, and "Good Christian Men, Rejoice" was published in 1853 in a collection titled *Carols for Christmastide*.

"Jubilo" is still popular today; the Choir of King's College, Cambridge made a recording of it that is quite exquisite (*The World of Christmas*). While this particular collection appears to be unavailable, the Choir has issued a number of other Christmas collections.

Here's more on the famous [Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols](#) held each Christmas at King's College.

Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart and soul and voice,
Give ye heed to what we say:

News! News!

Jesus Christ is born today!
Ox and ass before him bow,
And he is in the manger now.

Christ is born today!

Christ is born today!

Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart and soul and voice,
Now ye hear of endless bliss:

Joy! Joy!

Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath ope'd the heav'nly door,
And man is blessed evermore.

Christ was born for this!

Christ was born for this!

Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart and soul and voice,
Now ye need not fear the grave:

Peace! Peace!

Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all,
To gain his everlasting hall.

Christ was born to save!

Christ was born to save!

Good King Wenceslas

Words: John Mason Neale, 1853

Music: "Tempus adest florum," from *Piae Cantiones*, 1582



First published in 1853, "Good King Wenceslas" was popularized in 1871 in Bramley and Stainer's *Christmas Carols New and Old*. Always a favorite with the public, it deeply offended purists, who felt Neale had ruined a delightful spring carol tune with words of no merit at all.

In the mid-1920s, the compilers of the influential *Oxford Book of Carols* called the narrative "confused" yet included "Good King Wenceslas" in the hope that with so many good carols around it would lose favor. Now *that's* confused. Sometimes the experts can be way out of touch.

Wenceslas was a 9th century duke of Bohemia, of legendary generosity. St. Stephen's Day is December 26.

For more on John Mason Neale, see [Good Christian Men, Rejoice](#).

Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even:
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gath'ring winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain;
Right against the forest fence,
By St. Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither;
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither."
Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together,
Through the rude wind's wild lament,
And the bitter weather.

"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good page,
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Carol of the Bells (Shchedryk)

Words: Peter Wilhousky

Music: Traditional Ukrainian carol arranged by Mykola Leontovich



In its original form, "Carol of the Bells" was not about Christmas--or about bells, for that matter. It was an old Ukrainian carol traditionally sung on New Year's Eve, which is January 13 in the Ukraine. Such carols are called *shchedrivka*, and this one is probably the most famous.

It came to the attention of western audiences in 1919 when the Ukrainian Republican Capella Choir under the direction of composer Alexander Koshetz toured Europe and North America. (Koshetz later moved to the U.S and ultimately to Winnipeg, where he died in 1944.)

The arrangement by Mykola Leontovich (1877-1921) captured the attention of critics and audiences alike, and Peter Wilhousky (1902-78), an American educator and choir director, provided the English words.

The original "Shchedryk" expresses the singers' hopes for an early Spring and bountiful harvest. Nary a bell to be heard. Perhaps because Wilhousky's words change the carol's meaning, some critics have been quite churlish about "Carol of the Bells." Their reaction is reminiscent of that made by the experts over "[Good King Wenceslas](#)," when John Mason Neale's narrative changed the meaning of an ancient spring carol.

Hark! how the bells; sweet silver bells,
All seem to say "Throw cares away".
Christmas is here, Bringing good cheer
To young and old, Meek and the bold
Ding, dong, ding, dong, That is their song,
With joyful ring, All caroling.

One seems to hear, Words of good cheer,
From ev'rywhere, Filling the air
O, how they pound, Raising the sound,
O'er hill and dale, Telling their tale,
Gayly they ring, While people sing
Songs of good cheer, Christmas is here!

Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas!
Merry, merry, merry, merry Christmas!
On, on they send, On without end
Their joyful tone, To every home.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Words: Charles Wesley, 1739; adapted by George Whitefield, Martin Madan and others.

Music: "Mendelssohn," adapted by W.H. Cummings (1856) from a chorus by Felix Mendelssohn, 1840.



The "poet laureate" of the Methodist movement, Charles Wesley (1707-88) wrote more than 6,000 hymns, a prodigious output. Like Isaac Watts he was spurred by the dreariness of the psalm singing still prevalent in the English churches. (His brother John, founder of the Methodist movement, described it as "scandalous doggerel.")

This hymn was published in 1739, with the opening lines "Hark how all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings." George Whitefield gave us the familiar opening in 1753; further revisions and the refrain were added still later. Dr. W.H. Cummings, organist at Waltham Abbey, discovered that a chorus written by Felix Mendelssohn suited perfectly (although the composer himself had earlier stated he felt the music was quite unsuited to sacred words) and the complete hymn first appeared in print in 1857.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies,
With th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing
"Glory to the new-born King."

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King."

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of peace!
Hail, the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Ris'n with healing in his wings.
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:
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King."

Here We Come A-Wassailing

Words: Traditional English Carol

Music:



"Wassail" is a contraction of an Old English salutation, *wes hal*, meaning "be in good health." In former times, carollers carried a wassail bowl filled with suitable refreshment from door to door. That, at any rate, is what I've read. Not sure I believe it, given the difficulty of carrying a bowl filled with liquid without spilling.

This northern England carol appeared in an 1868 collection titled *Songs of the Nativity* by W.H. Husk.

Here we come a-wassailing
Among the leaves so green;
Here we come a-wand'ring,
So fair to be seen.

Refrain:

Love and joy come to you,
And to you your wassail, too.
And God bless you and send you
a happy new year,
And God send you a happy new year!

We are not daily beggars
That beg from door to door;
But we are neighbors' children
Whom you have seen before.

Refrain

God bless the master of this house,
Likewise the mistress, too;
And all the little children
That round the table go.

Refrain

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Words: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, c.1863
Johnny Marks, 1956
Music: "Waltham," by J. B. Calkin, 1872
"Illsley," by John Bishop, c.1700



The injury of his son in battle inspired Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82) to write "Christmas Bells," from which this carol is taken. It has been adapted to several melodies, among them the folk tune "Perseverance" and the hymns "Waltham" and "Illsley," by English composers J. Baptiste Calkin and John Bishop.

The most widely recognized setting today, however, is probably the one by composer Johnny Marks ("Rudolph") written in 1956. It was recorded first by his friend Bing Crosby. Prior to its release, Marks's office received a call from Decca Records seeking information for the record label: they wanted to know who this lyricist Longfellow was.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

I thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair, I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail,
The right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men!"

In the Bleak Midwinter

Words: Christina G. Rossetti, 1872

Music: "Cranham," by Gustav Holst, 1906



"In the Bleak Midwinter" first appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* magazine in January 1972 under the title "A Christmas Carol." (One of Hans Christian Andersen's lesser-known stories appeared in the same issue.)

The poem together with the music by Gustav Holst (1874-1934) was printed in the *English Hymnal* of 1906. The third line of the third verse originally read "But only his mother..." which was fine for the poem, but just doesn't sing well.

A more recent and perhaps more comfortable melody for these words was composed by Harold Darke (1888-1976). I've not been able to find a recording of it.

Christina Rossetti (1830-94) suffered from ill-health in later life and though engaged never married. She is best-known for her poetry, which ranged from fantasy to love-lyrics, sonnets and religious verse.

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him: give my heart.

I Saw Three Ships

Words &
Music:

Traditional English carol



The third verse sometimes reads "The Virgin Mary and Christ were there," or "'Twas Joseph and his wife Mary." This version is from Sandys' *Christmas Carols* (1833).

I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas Day in the morning.

And what was in those ships all three?
On Christmas Day, etc.

Our Savior Christ and his lady,
On Christmas Day, etc.

Pray, whither sailed those ships all three?
On Christmas Day, etc.

O they sailed in to Bethlehem,
On Christmas Day, etc.

And all the bells on earth shall ring,
On Christmas Day, etc.

Then let us all rejoice amain!
On Christmas Day, etc.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Words: Edmund H. Sears, 1849

"Carol," by Richard S. Willis, 1850

Music: "Noel," traditional air arranged by Sir Arthur Sullivan, 1874



This "glorious song" is one of the best-known American carols, written by the Rev. E. H. Sears (1810-76), a Unitarian minister. The words were first published in *The Christian Register* in 1850. The tune most people associate with the carol was adapted from a musical work by Richard Willis (1819-1900), and suits these words very well. The carol and "Carol" first appeared together in print in 1910.

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven's all gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the heavenly strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The tidings which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

For lo, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And all the world send back the song
Which now the angels sing.

I Wonder as I Wander

Words &
Music:

John Jacob Niles, 1934



The third line varies: some versions substitute "For people, just people..." or "To save lowly people..."

"I Wonder as I Wander" first appeared in Niles's *Songs of the Hill-Folk*, published in 1934. This was a collection of folk-songs heard and transcribed by Niles as he travelled through the Appalachians, much like Cecil Sharpe in England (see [The Holly and the Ivy](#)).

In 1958 Niles explained that "I Wonder" was not transcribed, but rather grew out of three lines of verse and a fragment of tune heard in Murphy, North Carolina. It would seem that the carol is more his own creation than a folk song.

Niles (1892-1980) was a musician and composer; another of his folk compositions was "Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair."

More about [John Jacob Niles](#).

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus, the Savior, did come for to die.
For poor on'ry people like you and like I.:
I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wisemen and farmers and shepherds and all.
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing:
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing;
Or all of God's angels in heaven to sing,
He surely could have it, 'Cause he was the King.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus, the Saviour, did come for to die.
For poor ornery people like you and like I.:
I wonder as I wander, Out under the sky.

Jingle Bell Rock

Words &
Music:

Jim Boothe and Joe Beal, 1957



Whether intentionally or not, this was written exactly 100 years after "Jingle Bells." Recorded by Bobby Helms in 1958, it went on to sell a million copies. Joe Beal (1900-) was a composer, author and publisher; Texas-born Jim Boothe (1917-1976) was a reporter and copy writer.

Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle bell rock
Jingle bells swing and jingle bells ring,
Snowing and blowing up bushels of fun
Now the jingle hop has begun.

Jingle bell, jingle bell, jingle bell rock
Jingle bells chime in jingle bell time
Dancing and prancing in Jingle Bell Square
In the frosty air.

What a bright time, it's the right time
To rock the night away.
Jingle bell time is a swell time,
To go gliding in a one-horse sleigh.

Giddy-up jingle horse, pick up your feet
Jingle around the clock
Mix and a-mingle in the jingling beat
That's the jingle bell,
That's the jingle bell,
That's the jingle bell rock!

Jolly Old Saint Nicholas

Words &
Music:

Traditional, probably American



Even carols occasionally have to change with the times. In earlier versions of this one, Susy wanted a dolly (which Nellie thought was folly).

Jolly old Saint Nicholas,
Lean your ear this way!
Don't you tell a single soul
What I'm going to say;
Christmas Eve is coming soon;
Now, you dear old man,
Whisper what you'll bring to me;
Tell me if you can.

When the clock is striking twelve,
When I'm fast asleep,
Down the chimney broad and black
With your pack you'll creep;
All the stockings you will find
Hanging in a row;
Mine will be the shortest one,
You'll be sure to know.

Johnny wants a pair of skates;
Susy wants a sled;
Nellie wants a picture book,
Yellow, blue and red;
Now I think I'll leave to you
What to give the rest;
Choose for me, dear Santa Claus,
You will know the best.

Joy to the World

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719

Music: "Antioch," by Lowell Mason, 1839



Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was one of the great hymn writers, and the first to produce a modern-style hymnbook. His collection of hymns for children was another innovation. (From this came the phrases "How doth the little busy bee," and "Birds in their little nests agree".)

Watts' *Psalms of David* (1719) was first printed in America in 1729 by Ben Franklin. Partly because it didn't contain all the psalms, and also because Watts had written them as if David were an Englishman, the colonists were not wild about it.

"Joy to the World" is based on Psalm 98. The tune was one of more than 1,100 from the pen of Lowell Mason (1792-1872), the first commercially successful American composer. His *Collection of Sacred Music* (1822), published by the Boston Handel and Haydn Society, sold some 50,000 copies in the years following its publication.

There are those who argue that "Joy's" melody is borrowed Handel; details can be found on [Hymnuts](#). I don't know enough Handel to comment, beyond observing that many artists borrow, and it's not as if this was Mason's only musical contribution.

Whatever the case, "Joy to the World" is in my opinion the happiest blend of words and music to be found anywhere in the Christmas carol universe, with the possible exception of "Silent Night."



Because to me it perfectly captures the beauty of morning after a bad night, I featured "Joy to the World" in my novel, *Owen's Day*, about a man who saves a child's life then disappears. The carol was played after a blizzard by members of a junior high band.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the world! The Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders of his love,
And wonders, and wonders of his love.



Sleigh Ride

Words: Mitchell Parish, 1950
Music: Leroy Anderson, 1948



"Sleigh Ride" is one of the best of the 20th century Christmas songs, with its evocative melody and vivid lyrics. Mitchell Parish (1900-1993) also wrote the lyrics for "Star Dust" and "Deep Purple." Leroy Anderson (1908-75) made a best-selling recording of "Sleigh Ride" in 1950.

PBS has a biography and other information on Leroy Anderson, including his thoughts on the lyricist, Mitchel Parrish. Anderson also wrote "Blue Tango," "The Typewriter" and "Syncopated Clock."



Just hear those sleigh bells jingling, ring-ting-tingling too;
Come on, it's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with
you

Outside the snow is falling and friends are calling "Yoo
Hoo"

Come on, it's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with
you

Giddy-up giddy-up giddy-up let's go
Let's look at the show

We're riding in a wonderland of snow
Giddy-up giddy-up giddy-up it's grand

Just holding your hand
We're gliding along with the song
Of a wintry fairy land!

Our cheeks are nice and rosy and comfy cozy are we
We're snuggled up together like birds of a feather would be
Let's take the road before us and sing a chorus or two,
Come on, it's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with
you

There's a Christmas party at the home of Farmer Grey
It'll be the perfect ending of a perfect day
We'll be singing the songs we love to sing without a single
stop

At the fireplace while we watch the chestnuts pop.

There's a happy feeling nothing in the world can buy;
As they pass around the coffee and the pumpkin pie
It'll nearly be like a picture print by Currier and Ives
These wonderful things are the things we remember all
through our lives

Just hear those sleigh bells jingling, ring-ting-tingling too.
Come on, it's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with
you

Let's take the road before us and sing a chorus or two
Come on, it's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with
you.

Mary's Boy Child

Words &
Music:

Jester Hairston, 1956.



Jester Hairston (1901-2000) was born in North Carolina, and educated at Tufts and Juillard. He composed for various Broadway musicals, but may be best known for this sweet calypso carol written in 1956, and for the folk songs "Amen" (from the film *Lilies of the Field*) and "Rocka My Soul."

Working with Dimitri Tiomkin, Hairston was choral director on a number of films including *Lost Horizon* and *Red River*. He acted in more than 20 films, including *Heat of the Night* and John Wayne's *The Alamo*. And he was a regular on the TV series *Amen*. For more on his life, you might want to check out this 1980 [interview](#).

Many artists have recorded "Mary's Boy Child." My favorite is still the old 1957 Harry Belafonte recording; the Boney M reggae version in 1978 is also good. That was a big hit in Britain: #1 for four weeks, it sold a million copies in just two months.

Long time ago, in Bethlehem,
So the Holy Bible say,
Mary's boy child Jesus Christ,
Was born on Christmas Day.

Refrain:

Hark, now hear the angels sing!
A new king born today,
And man will live forevermore,
Because of Christmas Day.
Trumpets sound and angels sing,
Listen what they say,
That man will live forevermore,
Because of Christmas Day.

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
They saw a bright new shining star,
They heard a choir sing,
The music seemed to come from afar.
Now, Joseph and his wife, Mary,
Came to Bethlehem that night,
They found no place to born she child,
Not a single room was in sight.

Refrain:

By and by, they find a little nook,
In a stable all forlorn,
And in a manger cold and dark,
Mary's little boy was born!

Refrain:

O Tannenbaum (O Christmas Tree)

Words &
Music:

Traditional German Carol



As is the case with many of these old carols, credit for the lyrics goes to the eclectic Anon. "O Tannenbaum" seems to have as many English versions as there are carol books. The first verse is the translation I grew up with. I've added a more poetic rendering as the last verse. Translators are an underappreciated crowd.



O Christmas tree,
O Christmas tree,
How faithful are thy branches!
O Christmas tree,
O Christmas tree,
How faithful are thy branches!
Green not alone in summertime,
But in the winter's snow and rime,
O Christmas tree,
O Christmas tree,
How faithful are thy branches!

O Tannenbaum,
O Tannenbaum,
Wie treu sind deine Blätter!
O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
Wie treu sind deine Blätter!
Du griinst nicht nur zur Sommerzeit,
Nein, auch im Winter, wenn es schneit.
O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
Wie treu sind deine Blätter!

O Christmas tree,
O Christmas tree,
How faithfully you blossom!
O Christmas tree,
O Christmas tree,
How faithfully you blossom!
Through summer's heat and winter's chill
Your leaves are green and blooming still.
O Christmas tree,
O Christmas tree,
How faithfully you blossom!

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Words &
Music:

12 Century Latin plainsong



This is an Advent hymn. It foretells the coming of Christ based on verses in Isaiah and other books of the Bible. Immanuel is Hebrew for "God with us."

According to the Reader's Digest Merry Christmas Songbook a new verse was sung each day from December 16th to the 23rd.

These words are based on the translation by John Mason Neale in 1851. Neale was a scholar and translator whose Christmas contributions include Good Christian Men, Rejoice and Good King Wenceslas.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.

Refrain

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,*
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

Refrain

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

Refrain

O come, O come, thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes from Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave** the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

Refrain

O Come, All Ye Faithful (*Adeste Fideles*)

Words: John Frances Wade, 1751; English translation by Frederick Oakeley and others, 1852
Music: "Adeste Fideles," by John Frances Wade, 1760



The origins of "Adeste Fideles," were for years obscure. It was thought to be a French or German composition, dating from perhaps the 17th century. After being performed at the Chapel of the Portuguese Embassy in London, it became known as the "Portuguese Hymn," further clouding its origins.

The words from the original manuscript by John Francis Wade (1711-86) were published in 1760, along with the melody as we know it today. In 1841, the hymn was translated by Canon Frederick Oakeley, with the opening lines, "Ye faithful, approach ye." It was first published in 1852 in Murray's Hymnal, with the familiar opening lines. While numerous other translations have been made, Oakeley's is the most widely recognized.

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him,
Born the King of angels:
Refrain:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.

See how the shepherds,
Summoned to his cradle,
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
We too will thither
Bend our joyful footsteps:
Refrain:

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
Glory to God
In the highest:
Refrain:

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
Born this happy morning,
Jesu, to thee be glory giv'n;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing:
Refrain:

O Holy Night (Cantique de Noel)

Words: Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure, 1847
English translation by John Sullivan Dwight, c. 1847
Music: "Cantique de Noel," by Adolphe Adam



French composer Adolphe Adam (1803-56) wrote many works but is best known for the ballet *Giselle* and this melody. John Sullivan Dwight (1813-93) was an American minister and music journalist. While he had no formal music training, his influence as a critic was considerable, both as president of the Harvard Musical Association and editor of *Dwight's Journal of Music*.

Carol singing note: If any of your party guests is able and willing to go solo on this hymn, the results can be quite marvellous for the rest of the crowd (they should come in on the chorus only).

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.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;
Fall on your knees,
Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!
O night, O holy night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here came the wise men from Orient land.
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!
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!

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.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name;
Christ is the Lord,
O praise His name for ever!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Words: Phillips Brooks, 1868

Music: "St. Louis," by Lewis H. Redner, 1858

"Forest Green," traditional English air adapted by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906



A visit to Bethlehem in 1865 inspired Phillips Brooks (1835-93), rector of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia, to write this carol for his Sunday School children. Lewis Redner (1831-1908), who wrote the tune "St. Louis," was both a successful real estate broker and organist at Holy Trinity.

"O Little Town of Bethlehem" was first performed on December 27, 1868 and became widely known after its publication in the Episcopal Church's *Hymnal* (1892). It was introduced in England in 1906 when it appeared in *The English Hymnal* with the folk tune arranged by Vaughan Williams (1872-1958). This is one carol that is equally well served by either of two beautiful melodies.

Phillips Brooks was an inspired preacher and by all accounts a very good man. He became Bishop of Massachusetts in 1891, just two years before his death. His sermons are still read today (see the [Books](#) section). For memorable quotes by Brooks, [click here](#).

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.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
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.

Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

Words: Sammy Cahn, 1945

Music: Jule Styne, 1945



A hot summer's day In L.A. inspired this song. Rather than going to the beach, the two collaborators decided to stay home and "think cold." "Let It Snow" was the happy result. Both enjoyed numerous other successes, together and separately. Sammy Cahn (1913-1993) had many hits, including "High Hopes" and "Anything Goes," while Jule Styne (1905-1994) worked in Hollywood and later New York. His work included *Gypsy*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Funny Girl*.

Oh, the weather outside is frightful,
But the fire is so delightful,
And since we've no place to go,
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

It doesn't show signs of stopping,
And I've bought some corn for popping,
The lights are turned way down low,
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

When we finally kiss goodnight,
How I'll hate going out in the storm!
But if you'll really hold me tight,
All the way home I'll be warm.

The fire is slowly dying,
And, my dear, we're still good-bying,
But as long as you love me so,
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

Old Toy Trains

Words &
Music:

Roger Miller, 1967



"Old Toy Trains" was actually written in 1965, though not recorded by Roger Miller (1936-92) until 1967. His original second line was "Little boy toys coming from a sack".

Miller is remembered for a string of hits in the '60s, including "Little Green Apples," "England Swings" and the fabulous "King of the Road." He received five Grammy awards in 1964 and six in 1965. He so dominated the awards in those two years that they changed the rules thereafter.

Roger Miller wrote the score for the Broadway show "The Big River," which won the Tony award for best musical of 1985. (He is the only country artist ever to win a Tony.) The Nashville Songwriters Foundation lists all his awards.

If like me you have a weakness for "King of the Road," you can listen to it at the website maintained by Roger Miller's wife, Mary: www.rogermiller.com/jukebox.html.

Nana Mouskouri popularized "Old Toy Trains" in 1972 on her album *Christmas with Nana*.

Old toy trains, little toy tracks,
Little toy drums coming from a sack
Carried by a man dressed in white and red
Little boy, don't you think it's time you were in bed?

Close your eyes, listen to the skies
All is calm, all is well
Soon you'll hear Kris Kringle and the jingle bells
Bringing old toy trains, little toy tracks
Little toy drums coming from a sack
Carried by a man dressed in white and red
Little boy, don't you think it's time you were in bed?

The Twelve Days of Christmas

Words: Traditional English counting song

Music:



Dating from the 13th century, this carol became popular not only in England but also in France, Canada and the United States, and each region introduced its own variations. The original "four colly birds" (probably blackbirds) have become "calling birds" or sometimes "colored birds."

According to the *Shorter New Oxford Book of Carols*, only with the addition in 1909 of the copyrighted musical phrase for "five gold rings" did the tune become standardized.



On the first day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
A partridge in a pear tree.

On the second day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Two turtledoves and a
partridge in a pear tree.

On the third day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Three French hens, etc.

On the fourth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Four calling birds, etc.

On the fifth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Five gold rings, etc.

On the sixth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Six geese a-laying, etc.

On the seventh day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Seven swans a-swimming,
etc.

On the eighth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Eight maids a-milking, etc.

Nine ladies dancing, etc.
On the ninth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me

On the tenth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Ten lords a-leaping, etc.

On the eleventh day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Eleven pipers piping, etc.

On the twelfth day of
Christmas
My true love sent to me
Twelve drummers
drumming,
Eleven pipers piping,
Ten lords a-leaping,
Nine ladies dancing,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five gold rings.
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtledoves,
And a partridge in a pear
tree.

Once in Royal David's City

Words: Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848

Music: "Irby," by H.J. Gauntlett, 1858



Of the 40 works published in *Hymns for Little Children* (1848), three rank among the best-loved of all hymns: "Royal David's City," "All Things Bright and Beautiful," and "There is a Green Hill." Cecil Frances Humphreys (1823-95) wrote them to explain aspects of the church service to children. But as with the best children's literature, they appeal to people of all ages. Two years after her hymns were published, she married the Rev. William Alexander, who later became a bishop and ultimately Archbishop of Ireland.

This carol traditionally leads off the renowned ["Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols"](#) held at King's College Cambridge each Christmas Eve.

Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for his bed;
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall;
With the poor and mean and lowly,
Lived on earth our Savior holy.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love,
For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above;
And he leads his children on
To the place where he is gone.

Past Three O'Clock

Words: Traditional, with verses by G.R. Woodward

Music:



The refrain and tune for this carol go back several hundred years, and were sung by the watchmen (or "waits") of London. G.R. Woodward (1848-1934) added verses in the 19th century.

Carol singing note: The carol is best sung as though you were anxious to get home and sit by the fire.

Refrain:

Past three o'clock
And a cold frosty morning
Past three o'clock,
Good morrow, masters all!

Born is a baby,
Gentle as may be,
Son of th' eternal
Father supernal.

Refrain

Seraph choir singeth,
Angel bell ringeth:
Hark how they rhyme it,
Time it, and chime it.

Refrain

Mid earth rejoices
Hearing such voices
Ne'ertofores so well
Carolling Nowell.

Refrain

Light out of star-land,
Leadeth from far land
Princes, to meet him,
Worship and greet him.

Refrain

Myrrh from full coffer,
Incense they offer:
Nor is the golden
Nugget withholden.

Refrain

Thus they: I pray you,
Up, sirs, nor stay you
Till ye confess him,
Likewise, and bless him.

Patapan

Words &
Music:

Traditional French



This cheerful carol (even if it is in a minor key) came from the collection *Noëls bourguignons de Bernard de la Monnoye* printed in 1842. Bernard lived from 1641 to 1728.

Willie, take your little drum,
With your whistle, Robin, come!
When we hear the fife and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu, pat-a-pat-a-pan,
When we hear the fife and drum,
Christmas should be frolicsome.

Thus the men of olden days
Loved the King of kings to praise:
When they hear the fife and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu, pat-a-pat-a-pan,
When we hear the fife and drum,
Christmas should be frolicsome.

God and man are now become
More at one than fife and drum.
When you hear the fife and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu, pat-a-pat-a-pan,
When we hear the fife and drum,
Christmas should be frolicsome.

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Words:

Music: Traditional spiritual



Probably dating from the late 19th century, this spiritual appeared in a 1909 collection, *Religious Songs of the Negro as Sung on the Plantations*, edited by Thomas P. Fenner.

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.

The shepherds feared and trembled
When lo! above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth:

Chorus:

Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.

When I was a seeker,
I sought both night and day,
I ask the Lord to help me,
And he show me the way:

Chorus:

He made me a watchman
Upon a city wall,
And if I am a Christian
I am the least of all:

Chorus:

Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree

Words &
Music:

Johnny Marks, 1958



Like a number of other Christmas songs, this one was created during the summer. Johnny Marks (1909-85), who also wrote "Rudolph," "A Holly Jolly Christmas," and "The Night Before Christmas Song," was vacationing in Vermont at the time. He was admiring the fir trees while watching some teens dancing to rock music, when the idea came to him.

First recorded by Brenda Lee in 1960 (for sales of more than 4.5 million copies) it has been recorded by many others, Three Dog Night and Crystal Gayle to name just two.

Marks founded his own publishing company, St. Nicholas Music, in 1949.

Rockin' around the Christmas tree
At the Christmas party hop,
Mistletoe hung where you can see
Every couple tries to stop

Rocking around the Christmas tree
Let the Christmas Spirit ring
Later we'll have some pumpkin pie
And we'll do some caroling.

You will get a sentimental feeling when you hear
Voices singing "Let's be jolly;
Deck the halls with boughs of holly"

Rocking around the Christmas tree
Have a happy holiday
Everyone dancing merrily
In a new old fashioned way

You will get a sentimental feeling when you hear
Voices singing "Let's be jolly;
Deck the halls with boughs of holly"

Rocking around the Christmas tree
Have a happy holiday
Everyone dancing merrily
In a new old fashioned way

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Words &
Music:

Johnny Marks, 1958



Perhaps the most popular of all carols with children, "Rudolph" was inspired by a story written for the Montgomery Ward retail chain in 1939. The song was first recorded in 1949 by an unenthusiastic Gene Autry. He felt it did not fit his cowboy image, but his wife loved it. "Put it on the B side," she asked him (this being back in the days of vinyl records), and it became an instant and colossal hit, second only in sales to Bing Crosby's recording of "White Christmas." More than 500 versions have since been recorded, and the song has been translated into every language.

The Rudolf TV show has aired every December for the past 40 years. Johnny Marks (1909-85) wrote a number of additional songs for the show, among them A Holly Jolly Christmas. He also wrote "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" and the music for "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

The Associated Press once said of Marks that he was "as identified with Christmas songs as Stephen Foster is with sentimental ballads of the Old South."

Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer,
Had a very shiny nose.
And if you ever saw him,
you would even say it glows.

All of the other reindeer
used to laugh and call him names.
They never let poor Rudolph
join in any reindeer games.

Then one foggy Christmas Eve
Santa came to say:
"Rudolph with your nose so bright,
won't you guide my sleigh tonight?"

Then all the reindeer loved him
as they shouted out with glee,
Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer,
you'll go down in history!



See Amid the Winter's Snow

Words: Rev. E. Caswall, 1851
Music: Sir John Goss, 1870



"See Amid the Winter's Snow" was published in *Easy Hymn Tunes* in 1851. But its first appearance with the melody by which it is sung today was in Bramley & Stainer's *Christmas Carols New and Old* in 1871, under the title "Hymn for Christmas Day."

Was the tune by Sir John Goss written at the request of Bramley & Stainer? Judging by the date, it seems possible. Goss was organist at St. Paul's for more than 30 years and an influential member of the London music scene.

Edward Caswall was an Anglican curate who converted to Catholicism in 1848. He was best known as a translator of ancient hymns.

Hear a rendition of this hymn by [King's College Cambridge](#).

See amid the winter's snow,
Born for us on earth below;
See the tender Lamb appears,
Promised from eternal years:

Refrain:

Hail thou ever-blessed morn;
Hail, redemption's happy dawn;
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Lo, within a manger lies
He who built the starry skies;
He who, throned in height sublime,
Sits amid the cherubim:

Refrain:

Say, ye holy shepherds, say
What your joyful news today;
Wherefore have ye left your sheep
On the lonely mountain steep?

Refrain:

"As we watched at dead of night,
Lo, we saw a wondrous light;
Angels singing 'Peace on earth'
Told us of the Savior's birth":

Refrain:

Sacred infant, all divine,
What a tender love was thine,
Thus to come from highest bliss
Down to such a world as this:

Refrain:

Teach, O teach us, holy Child,
By thy face so meek and mild,
Teach us to resemble thee,
In thy sweet humility:

Refrain:

Silent Night (Stille Nacht)

Words: Joseph Mohr, 1818; English translation by John Freeman Young, 1863

Music: Franz Gruber, 1818



The story of "Silent Night" reads like a fairy tale. It was written for the Christmas Eve service at the Church of St. Nicholas, in the village of Oberndorf in the Austrian Tyrol by Joseph Mohr (1792-1848), the assistant parish priest. The church organ had broken down and he needed a simple carol with a tune suitable for guitar accompaniment. The organist, Franz Gruber (1787-1863), supplied just such a melody.

"Stille Nacht" gained wide popularity throughout Europe, and eventually traveled the Atlantic with the Rainer Family (a 19th century version of the von Trapp Family), who did much to popularize it in the U.S.

Many English translations have been made, and this one has been ascribed to many people. It was first published in 1863, in *The Sunday-School Service and Tune Book*, by J.C. Hollister, where it appeared by permission of the author, the Rev. J. Freeman Young (1820-85), who later became Bishop of Florida.

That good words make a difference to a song's popularity may be seen from the fact that despite several translations, Silent Night never achieved much popularity in England until World War II, when Rev. Young's version was brought over by the American soldiers.

Possibly the best-loved of all Christmas carols, "Stille Nacht" has been translated into virtually every language on earth, and recorded by every conceivable artist. Bing Crosby always maintained his recording of Silent Night outsold his White Christmas, which is saying something.

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,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing "Alleluia,"
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born.

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.



Winter Wonderland

Words: Dick Smith, 1934
Music: Felix Bernard, 1934



The first of the 20th century contemporary carols, "Winter Wonderland" retains its freshness and perennial appeal. It was first recorded by Perry Como in 1946. Since then, numerous artists have scored similar successes with it, including Johnny Mathis, the Andrews Sisters and Dean Martin.

Sleigh-bells ring, are you listenin'?
In the lane, snow is glistening
A beautiful sight,
We're happy tonight,
Walking in a winter wonderland.

Gone away is the bluebird,
Here to stay is a new bird
He sings a love song,
As we go along,
Walking in a winter wonderland.

In the meadow we can build a snowman,
Then pretend that he is Parson Brown
He'll say: Are you married?
We'll say: No man,
But you can do the job
When you're in town.
Walking in a winter wonderland.

The Seven Joys of Mary

Words: Traditional English

Music:



"The Seven Joys of Mary" is one of the 12 traditional carols revived in Bramley & Stainer's *Christmas Carols New and Old*. It's a counting song perhaps inspired in medieval times by the Rosary. Variants flowered in Ireland and the United States; samples of these can be found in *The Shorter New Oxford Book of Carols*.

In some versions the line before the refrain is sung as "And blessed may we be".

The first good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of one;
To see the blessed Jesus Christ,
When he was first her Son.

When he was first her Son,

Good Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

Praise Father, Son, and Holy

Ghost

To all eternity.

The next good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of five;
To see her own Son Jesus
Christ,

Raising the dead to life.
Raising the dead to life, Good

Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

The next good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of two;
To see her own Son Jesus
Christ,

Making the lame to go.
Making the lame to go, Good

Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

The next good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of three;
To see her own Son Jesus
Christ,

Making the blind to see.
Making the blind to see, Good

Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

The next good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of four;
To see her own Son Jesus Christ
Reading the Bible o'er.

Reading the Bible o'er, Good

Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

The next good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of six;
To see her own Son Jesus Christ
Upon the Crucifix.

Upon the Crucifix, Good Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

The next good joy that Mary

had,

It was the joy of seven;
To see her own Son Jesus Christ
Ascending into Heaven.

Ascending into Heaven, Good

Lord;

And happy may we be;

Refrain:

The First Nowell

(*The First Noël*)

Words: Traditional English carol, c. 17th century

Music:



Christmas carols are called *weihnachtslieder* in Germany (meaning "Christmas eve songs"), and in France *noëls* ("Christmas"). This word came to England with the Normans as "no-well" and was used as a refrain of joy in many songs.

Once thought to be a French carol, "The First Nowell" actually originated in England, probably during the 17th century. It first appeared in print in William Sandys' *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern*, published in 1833.

Carol singing note: This is a long one. If you're the musicmaker at your party, start briskly, and consider skipping verses.



It was because of its length that I chose "The First Nowell" as the background carol for a love scene in my novel, *Owen's Day*, the story of a man who saves a child's life then disappears.

The first Nowell 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.

Refrain:

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
Born is the King of Israel.

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.

Refrain:

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.

Refrain:

This star drew nigh to the north-west,
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest,
And there it did both stop and stay
Right over the place where Jesus lay.

Refrain:

Then entered in those wise men three,
Full reverently upon their knee,
And offered there in his presence,
Their gold and myrrh and frankincense.

Refrain:

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

Refrain:

The Holly and the Ivy

Words: *Traditional English carol, c. 1700*

Music:



Possibly pagan in origin (with the holly and ivy symbolizing the masculine and feminine), this carol appeared in *Christmas Carols New and Old* (1871) but with a different tune. Its modern revival owes much to the efforts of Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), who included it in his collection *English Folk Carols* (1911) with the tune we know today.

Sharp was founder of the English Folk Dance Society, and collected folksongs not just in England but the southern Appalachians as well, for the purpose of preserving them. He would wander from village to village, seeking out the oldest residents and getting them to sing their favorite songs.

Sharp transcribed "The Holly and the Ivy" from a version he heard in Chipping Camden, Gloucestershire.

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

Refrain:

The rising of the sun
And the running of the deer,
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.

The holly bears a blossom
As white as the lily flower,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To be our sweet Savior.

Refrain:

The holly bears a berry
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
To do poor sinners good.

Refrain:

The holly bears a prickly
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ
On Christmas Day in the morn.

Refrain:

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all the trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown.

Christmas in Killarney

Words &
Music:

John Redmond, James Cavanaugh and Frank Weldon, 1950



Composer and author John Redmond founded his own publishing company and also served as president of the Religious Music Guild of America. James Cavanaugh and Frank Weldon both worked in vaudeville, as writer and music director respectively.

The holly green, the ivy green
The prettiest picture you've ever seen
The prettiest picture you've ever seen
Is Christmas in Killarney
With all of the folks at home

It's nice, you know, to kiss your beau
While cuddling under the mistletoe
And Santa Claus you know, of course
Is one of the boys from home

The door is always open
The neighbors pay a call
And Father John before he's gone
Will bless the house and all

How grand it feels to click your heels
And join in the fun of the jigs and reels
I'm handing you no blarney
The likes you've never known
Is Christmas in Killarney
With all of the folks at home

The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy

Words &
Music:

Traditional West Indian carol



This calypso Christmas song was first made popular by Trinidadian Edric Connor in his *West Indian Spirituals and Folk Tunes*. Harry Belafonte and the American folk group The Weavers have both recorded it.

As noted by the editors of the *Shorter New Oxford Book of Carols*, while the verse is calypso, the refrain has "powerful echoes of Africa."

Edric Connor (1913-68) was a singer and folklorist who moved to England in the 1940s and later became known as an actor as well as singer. In addition to film (*Moby Dick*) and stage roles he appeared in TV episodes of *The Avengers* and *Danger Man*.

The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,
The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,
The Virgin Mary had a baby boy,
And they say that his name was Jesus.

Refrain:

He come from the glory,
He come from the glorious Kingdom.
He come from the glory,
He come from the glorious Kingdom.
Oh yes, believer!
Oh yes, believer!
He come from the glory,
He come from the glorious Kingdom.

The angels sang when the baby born,
The angels sang when the baby born,
The angels sang when the baby born,
And they say that his name was Jesus.

Refrain:

The wise men saw where the baby born
The wise men saw where the baby born
The wise men went where the baby born
And they say that his name was Jesus.

Refrain:

The Huron Carol

(Jesus is Born)

Words: J. E. Middleton, 1926, from Huron words by Jean de Brebeuf

Music: "Une Jeune Pucelle" (traditional French air)



Also known by the title "Twas in the Moon of Wintertime," this may well be the oldest North American Christmas carol. The original Huron words were written in 1641 or thereabouts by the Jesuit missionary Jean de Brebeuf (1593-1649), who was later tortured and killed by the Iroquois. Brebeuf was canonized in 1940.

A French translation of "The Huron Carol" was made in 1913, and an English one in 1953. However, the lyrics given here are probably the best known English version, by J. E. Middleton (1872-1960). They are an interpretation of Brebeuf's words rather than a direct translation.

'Twas in the moon of wintertime,
When all the birds had fled
That mighty Gitchi Manitou
Sent angel choirs instead;
Before their light the stars grew dim,
And wond'ring hunters heard the hymn:

Refrain:

Jesus your King is born, Jesus is born,
In excelsis gloria.

Within a lodge of broken bark
The tender Babe was found,
A ragged robe of rabbit skin
Enwrapped his beauty round;
But as the hunter braves drew nigh,
The angel song rang loud and high.

Refrain:

The earliest moon of wintertime
Is not so round and fair
As was the ring of glory on
The helpless Infant there.
The chiefs from far before him knelt
With gifts of fox and beaver pelt.

Refrain:

O children of the forest free,
O sons of Manitou,
The Holy Child of earth and heaven
Is born today for you.
Come kneel before the radiant Boy,
Who brings you beauty, peace and joy.

Refrain:

Unto Us a Boy is Born (Puer nobis)

Words: 15th century Latin

Music: "Puer nobis nascitur," *Piae Cantiones*, 1582, arranged by Geoffrey Shaw.



Several variations exist of "Unto Us a Boy is Born." The carol was originally found in both German and Latin manuscripts, which may account for the differences.

Alternative title: "Unto Us is Born a Son."

The tune, too, has variations. In addition to the arrangement by Shaw, here's [another one](#), by Michael Praetorius, a 16th century composer.

Carol singing notes:

1. You can either sing the last line twice, as shown, or prolong the last word, (for example, "The Lord of every na----tion.")

2. Consider having males only sing the third verse and the fourth, females only.

Unto us a boy is born,
King of all creation:
Came he to a world forlorn
The Lord of every nation,
The Lord of every nation.

Cradled in a stall was he
With sleepy cows and asses;
But the very beasts could see
That He all men surpasses,
That He all men surpasses.

Herod then with fear was filled:
"A prince," he said, "in Jewry!"
All the little boys he killed
At Beth'lem in his fury,
At Beth'lem in his fury.

Now may Mary's Son, who came
So long ago to love us,
Lead us all with hearts aflame
Unto the joys above us,
Unto the joys above us.

Alpha and Omega He!
Let the organ thunder,
While the choir with peals of glee
Doth rend the air asunder,
Doth rend the air asunder.

Up on the House-top

Words &
Music:

Benjamin R. Hanby, 1860s



According to the Ohio Historical Society, "Up on the House-top" was published in 1866. Hanby (1833-67) wrote numerous songs including the anti-slavery song, "Darling Nellie Gray."

Carol singing note: "Up on the House-top" is a great carol to kick-start your party. Get everyone involved by dividing the group in two and sing the song as a round (like "Row, row, row your boat"). "Christmas is Coming" works equally well.

Up on the house-top, reindeer pause,
Out jumps good old Santa Claus;
Down through the chimney with lots of toys,
All for the little ones' Christmas joys.

Refrain:

Ho, ho, ho!

Who wouldn't go?

Ho, ho, ho!

Who wouldn't go?

Up on the house-top, click, click, click,
Down through the chimney with good Saint Nick.



We Three Kings of Orient Are

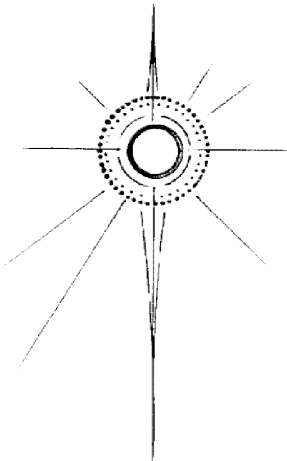
Words &
Music:

John H. Hopkins Jr. 1857



The old-world flavor of this carol belies its relatively recent American origins. Written and composed by the Rev. John Henry Hopkins, Jr. (1820-91), it was published little more than a century ago in the author's *Carols, Hymns and Songs* (1863).

The meaning of verse 3 becomes clearer if you substitute "signifies" for "owns." There seems to be no consensus on the closing lines; many versions give "Alleluia, alleluia, Earth to the heavens replies."



We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

Refrain:

O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light!

Born a king on Bethlehem's plain,
Gold I bring to crown him again,
King for ever, ceasing never,
Over us all to reign.

Refrain:

Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship him, God on high.

Refrain:

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Refrain:

Glorious now behold him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice;
Heaven sings alleluia, alle-
luia the earth replies.

Refrain:

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Traditional English carol



Dishes like figgy pudding were the reason English cooking used to have such a stodgy reputation. Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861) provides the recipe:

Combine 2 lbs. of chopped figs with 1 lb. suet, 1/2 lb. flour, 1/2 lb. breadcrumbs, 2 eggs and just enough milk to form a stiff paste. Press into a basin, cover and boil for "3 hours or rather longer." Average cost: 2 shillings. Serves 8.

Mrs. Beeton was a sort of mid-Victorian Martha Stewart, dispensing not only recipes but advice on how to run a household which, at that time, might number in the teens or twenties when you included servants.

Newly published in 2000, the *Book of Household Management's* 1,100 pages may be largely irrelevant to today's homemaker, but they present a fascinating picture of Victorian England.

We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas
And a happy new year.

Refrain:

Good tidings we bring to you and your kin,
We wish you a merry Christmas
And a happy new year.

Now bring us some figgy pudding,
Now bring us some figgy pudding,
Now bring us some figgy pudding,
Now bring us some here.

Refrain

We won't go until we get it,
We won't go until we get it,
We won't go until we get it,
So bring some right here.

Refrain

We all like our figgy pudding,
We all like our figgy pudding,
So bring us some figgy pudding,
With all its good cheer!

Refrain

We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas
And a happy new year.

What Child is This?

Words: William Chatterton Dix, c. 1865
Music: "Greensleeves," (traditional English air)



William Chatterton Dix may have written "What Child is This?" at the same time as "As With Gladness," but it was more likely written a few years later. Its popularity was assured when Sir John Stainer, a noted 19th century composer, set it to the old folk tune, "Greensleeves."



What child is this, who laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing,
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail, the word made flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come peasant, king, to own him.
The King of Kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise the song on high,
The Virgin sings her lullaby,
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The babe, the son of Mary!

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

Words: Nahum Tate

"Winchester Old," from Este's Psalter, 1592

Music: "Christmas," (1815) adapted by David Weyman from an aria by Handel arranged by Lowell Mason (1821)



Nahum Tate (1652-1715) was a Poet Laureate and playwright who died in a debtor's prison. He is best remembered for the psalter he wrote in collaboration with Nicholas Brady. It was published in 1696, and in the years following they produced a series of Supplements, containing hymns to be used in conjunction with the psalms. "While Shepherds" appeared in the Supplement of 1700, and is the only one of its 16 offerings still sung today.

"Winchester Old" is the tune most commonly associated with the carol in England and Canada, while "Christmas," the Handel adaptation arranged by Lowell Mason, is generally the preferred tune in the U.S. When singing the latter, the last line of each verse is repeated.

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.

"Fear not," said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind;
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

"To you, in David's town this day
Is born of David's line
A Savior, who is Christ the Lord;
And this shall be the sign:
"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid."

Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels, praising God, who thus
Addressed their joyful song:

"All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Good will henceforth from heaven to men
Begin, and never cease."

Patapan

Traditional French



This cheerful carol (even if it is in a minor key) came from the collection *Noëls bourguignons de Bernard de la Monnoye* printed in 1842. Bernard lived from 1641 to 1728.

Willie, take your little drum,
With your whistle, Robin, come!
When we hear the fife and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu, pat-a-pat-a-pan,
When we hear the fife and drum,
Christmas should be frolicsome.

Thus the men of olden days
Loved the King of kings to praise:
When they hear the fife and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu, pat-a-pat-a-pan,
When we hear the fife and drum,
Christmas should be frolicsome.

God and man are now become
More at one than fife and drum.
When you hear the fife and drum,
Tu-re-lu-re-lu, pat-a-pat-a-pan,
When we hear the fife and drum,
Christmas should be frolicsome.

White Christmas

Words: Irving Berlin

Music:



Irving Berlin had his finger firmly on the pulse of the American consciousness. He wrote one megahit after another. This was one of his biggest.

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten,
and children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white

Six White Boomers

Words &
Music:

Rolf Harris and John D. Brown, 1960



The Australian answer to "Rudolph," this delightful song was written by the many-faceted entertainer Rolf Harris. "Sun Arise" and "Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport" were two hits by Harris in the '60s, both displaying distinctively Australian sound effects.

Carol singing note: the fun increases if the parts of Joey and Santa are sung by two separate guests, with everyone else filling in the rest.



Early one Christmas Day a joey kangaroo,
Was far from home and lost in a great big zoo.
"Mummy, where's my mummy? They've taken her away."
"We'll help you find your mummy, son. Hop up on the sleigh."

Up beside the bag of toys the little joey hopped,
But they hadn't gone far when Santa stopped.
Unharnessed all the reindeer and Joey wondered why,
Then he heard a far-off booming in the sky.

Chorus:

Six white boomers, snow white boomers,
Racing Santa Claus through the blazing sun.
Six white boomers, snow white boomers,
On his Australian run.

Pretty soon old Santa began to feel the heat,
Took his fur lined boots off to cool his feet,
Into one popped Joey, feeling quite okay,
While those old man Kangaroos kept pulling on the sleigh.

Then Joey said to Santa, "Santa, what about the toys?
Aren't you giving some to these girls and boys?"
"They've got all their presents, son, we were here last night,
this trip is an extra trip, Joey's special flight."

Chorus:

Soon the sleigh was flashing past right over Marble Bar,
"Slow down there," cried Santa, "it can't be far,
Come up on my lap here, son, and have a look around."
"There she is, that's mummy, bounding up and down."

Well that's the bestest Christmas treat that Joey ever had,
Curled up in mother's pouch feeling snug and glad.
The last they saw was Santa heading northward from the sun,
The only year the boomers made a double run.

Chorus: