

Christmas Carol Sing

12/8/11

Introduction

This the time of the year when Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As with many religious celebrations it is customary to give praise and describe the happenings in song. For us this is represented by Christmas Carols. But there is more. These carols represent the work of devout people of various religious faiths and occupations. Today we continue the celebration of Christ's birth not only by singing carols but in addition reading scripture passages leading to the carols and sharing some of the backgrounds of those composing the carols. We begin with a hillside on a starry night.

People Sing about the Starry Night

Luk 2:8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luk 2:9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Luk 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

Luk 2:11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Luk 2:12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

Luk 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Luk 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Hark the Heralds Angels Sing I 48 5 1739

Charles Wesley was a prolific hymn writer! Ideas would even come to him while riding on horseback and he would stop , go into a house and request pen and ink. Hark the Herald Angles Sing came to him in 1739 when he was 32 years of age. Originally the first lines were somewhat different:

Hark how all the welkin rings
Glory to the King of Kings
Peace on Earth and Mercy Mild
God and sinners reconciled

Joyful all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies
Universal nature say
Christ the Lord is born today

The word “welkin” is an old English term for vault of heaven.
A friend evangelist George Whitefield published the carol and changed it th “Hark the herald angels sing” In1753.

It came upon the Midnight clear I 120 **10** 1849

Edmund Hamilton Sears was born in 1819 attended Union College in Schenectady, NY Harvard Divinity School and was ordained a Unitarian minister. At age 39 he wrote “It came upon the Midnight clear” It is unique in that it has no mention of Christ, only the request of the angels for peace on earth. After all he was a Unitarian minister..

The First Noel II 60 **18** 1823

“The First Noel” quietly sung on a snowy Christmas eve can bring tears to the eyes. If we only knew who wrote it. It first appeared anonymously in “Some Ancient Christmas Carols” published by David Gilbert in 1823 and the traditional music came form an unknown source in the west of England. The word Noel seems to be a French word derived from the Latin natalis meaning birthday.

Angels We have Heard on High II 92 **12** 1835

Angels We have Heard High started life as a French carol “Les Anges dans nos Campagnes” dating from the 1700’s. It was first published in English with the present words in 1862. Gloria in Excelsis Deo comes from the Latin Vulgate Luke 2:14 meaning of course Glory to God in the Highest.

Angels from the Realms of Glory I 90 **8** 1816

Psalm 148:2

Lime all Moravians, John Montgomery had a burden for world evangelism.. He was the only Moravian minister in Scotland. His calling led him and his wife to Barbados, leaving his son, James in a Moravian settlement near Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland James had a flair for poetry and writing and started working for a newspaper, eventually starting a paper of his own. He ws politically active and at lest twice thrown in jail for his views. Early on Christmas Eve 1816 opened his bible and reading Luke 2 was so impressed that he started writing. The resulting poem was published in his paper that Christmas. It was later set to music and was first sung in a Moravian church on Christmas day in 1821. His parents never saw him again. They died in Barbados. They would have been proud of him.

The tune to “What Child is This” is the familiar British folksong Greenslieves. Tradition has it that Henry VIII of England composed it but it is known for sure that his daughter Elizabeth I danced to it. It was licensed to two different printers in 1580. The words came from a longer poem written by an insurance agent William Chatterton Dix in Glasgow. . His greatest love was his prose and poetry for Christ. He wrote two books for children along with the Christmas carols “What Child is This” 1858 and “As with Gladness Men of Old”

Oh Little Town of Bethlehem I 166 7 1868

Phillips Brooks was an Episcopal minister who preached with great power in Philadelphia and Boston. At the age of thirty he visited the Holyland. On Dec. 24 1865 he attended a four hour service at the Church of the Nativity in Jerusalem. He was deeply moved. Two years later as he prepared for the Christmas season he wanted to compose a hymn for the children to sing during

their annual program. Thinking back to his experience in Jerusalem he composed the words to “O Little Town of Bethlehem” Taking them to the church organist, Lewis Redner, he asked him to write a tune. He said “If it is really good we will call the tune St. Lewis”. He was so pleased with the tune that he did name it after the organist, changing the name to “St. Louis to avoid embarrassing the organist.

And We Lift our Voices to Sing in General

Joy to the World II 24 2 1719

Isaac Watts had become tired of the church singing of his day—all psalms nicely translated, riming and stodgy. In 1719 he published his own songbook “Psalms of David Imitated in the language of the New Testament” Joy to the World had its origins in Psalm 98, verse 4., “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD.” Extended through Watts love of Christ.

Oh Come All ye Faithful I 50 3 1743

Matt 2:11

Francis Wade was hounded out of England in 1745 with a group of Roman Catholics, going to France and Portugal. Two years before he had produced a manuscript in Latin called Adeste Fidelis. Laeti Triumphants. He died in 1786. Much later the Catholics started returning back to England. An Anglican minister named Fredrick Oakeley at the Margaret Street Chapel in London discovered Wade’s manuscript. He was deeply moved and translated it into English beginning with the line “.Ye Faithful Approach Ye”. A few years later, now a Roman Catholic, and perhaps having a better knowledge of Latin he tried again coming up with the well known words. Oh Come All ye Faithful, joyful and Triumphant .

Of Course We cant Forget the Magi

Mat 2:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

Mat 2:10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

Mat 2:11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

We three Kings

II 88

11 1857

This hymn is indebted to two men Clement Clark Moore of “The Night before Christmas” fame and John H. Hopkins, Jr. who wrote it. Moore owned a large estate in Northern Manhattan. The Episcopal Church wanted to establish a seminary so Moore donated property from his estate and being a Hebrew scholar became one of its first professor teaching biblical languages. A reporter named John H. Hopkins, Jr. enrolled in the seminary and eventually became its first instructor of church music. He wrote We Three Kings as part of a Christmas pageant put on by the seminary in 1857.

Now the time has come to return to our individual pursuits. May the spirit of the Christ Child go with each of us and continue through the season and the year to come.

We Wish you a Merry Christmas