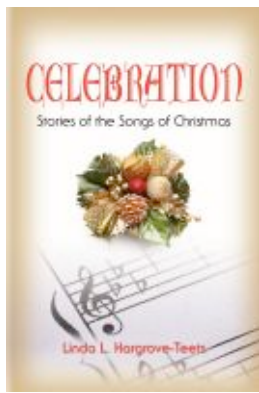


# CELEBRATION

Stories of the Songs of Christmas



Linda L. Hargrove-Teets



*This is a collection of stories about the development and history of 25 Christmas songs, some of which took hundreds of years and many participants to become the versions we sing today. From ancient times to present, the stories follow peoples' determination to celebrate Christmas. It is a playful book also, with smiles in each chapter. Christmas comments have been added from famous people, some very funny, most quite wise, all fun!*

# **Celebration**

## **Stories of the Songs of Christmas**

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# **CELEBRATION**

**Stories of the Songs of Christmas**

**LINDA HARGROVE-TEETS**

## **Celebration: Stories of the Songs of Christmas**

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### **LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH**

by Sy Miller and Jill Jackson

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### **ILLUSTRATIONS**

Nativity scenes depicted by artists of the 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> centuries  
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*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

**“I don’t know who ..... put the question; I don’t know  
when it was put. I don’t even remember answering. But  
at some  
moment I did answer yes.....and from that hour I was  
certain that existence is meaningful and that.....my  
life.....had a goal.  
From that moment I have known...not to look back and  
To take no thought for the morrow.”**

**Dag Hammarskjold, General Secretary of the United  
Nations**

# CELEBRATION

## It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

Edmund H. Sears, 1810-1876, alt.

CAROL C.M.D.  
Richard S. Willis, 1819-1900

1 It came up - on the mid-night clear, That glo - rious song of old,  
 2 Still through the clo - ven skies they come, With peace - ful wings un - furled,  
 3 And ye, be - neath life's crush - ing load Whose forms are bend - ing low,  
 4 For lo, the days are hasten - ing on, By proph - et bards fore - told,

From an - gels bend - ing near the earth To touch their harps of gold;  
 And still their heav - en - ly mu - sic floats O'er all the wea - ry world;  
 Who toil a - long the climb - ing way, With pain - ful steps and slow,  
 When with the ev - er - cir - cling years Comes round the age of gold;

"Peace on the earth, good will to men, From heaven's all gra - cious King."  
 A - bove its sad and low - ly plains They bend on hover - ing wing,  
 Look now, for glad and gold - en hours Come swift - ly on the wing;  
 When peace shall o - ver all the earth Its an - cient splen - dors fling,

The world in sol - emn still - ness lay To hear the an - gels sing.  
 And ev - er o'er its Ba - bel sounds The bless - ed an - gels sing.  
 O rest be - side the wea - ry road, And hear the an - gels sing!  
 And the whole world send back the song Which now the an - gels sing. A men.

## It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Edmund Hamilton Sears is the author of two Christmas carols that are mirror images of each other, yet written fifteen years apart. They are among the first hymns written in America.

Sears was born in Sandisfield, Massachusetts in 1819 and attended Union College in Schenectady, then Harvard Divinity School. He was ordained into the Unitarian ministry. He told friends he chose to serve in small towns because he wanted time to write.

He wrote the first hymn, *Calm on the Listening Ear*, when he was 24. It was a Christmas poem based on the celebration of Christ's birth by angels in Luke 2. It has the same meter and can be sung to the same tune as the more-famous hymn he would later write.

*Calm on the listening ear of night /Come heaven's melodious strains/  
Where wild Judea stretches far/Her silver-mantled plains/  
Celestial choirs, from courts above,/Shed sacred glories there,/  
And angels, with their sparkling lyres,/Make music on the air*

Sears was in his 30's when he wrote its more famous twin. *It Came upon the Midnight Clear* is one of the first carols with a message of social justice. It is a pretty unique Christmas carol since there is no mention of Christ, even as a baby, or of His destiny as the Savior. Of course, Sears was Unitarian. His focus in the hymn is the angelic declaration of the now (and ever) potential peace on earth.

If you notice the date of the hymn, 1849, you can realize it was written during the time social conflict was building within the United States, pushing us toward our Civil War. Also at that time, Sear's locality, New England, was experiencing lifestyle interruptions due to the manufacturing changes of the Industrial Revolution. We can see the foreboding in Sear's mind by looking at his words in the following stanza usually omitted from most hymnals:

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*Yet with the woes of sin and strife/The world hath suffered long;/  
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled/ Two thousand years of wrong;/  
And man, at war with man, hears not/The love song which they bring;/  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,/ And hear the angels sing!*

The hymn's music we sing today, originally entitled *Carol*, was composed by a popular 19<sup>th</sup> century American musician, Richard Storrs Willis. He studied music in Germany and his mentor was Felix Mendelssohn. The hymn's popularity was set once Willis revised his first arrangement and republished it a decade after his first arrangement, in 1860.

**“.....all us stumblers who believe love rules, stand up  
and let it shine.”**

**William P. Young, from *The Shack***



***16***

***Mary Had a Baby***

**“Spirituals are as faith-engendering and life-affirming for  
us in our time as they were for the community of  
believers that originally  
created, shaped, and preserved them.”**

**Christa Dixon**

*CELEBRATION*



## Mary Had a Baby

In his introduction of *The Second Book of Negro Spirituals*, originally published in 1925, James Weldon Johnson proposes that most spirituals regarding Christ's birth probably belong to a period after Emancipation because, during slavery, Christmas was not treated as a religious holiday in the South. This spiritual and *Rise Up Shepherd an' Foller* are among Johnson's "older" group.

Historian John Lovell, Jr. states "the genius of the black people who created over 6,000 existing African American spirituals was their ability to weave together complex ideas and make them appear simple." Look how much is accomplished in this seemingly simple spiritual: birth essentials, worship, covert warning. To me, the faith proclaimed by spirituals describes the slave's perception of God as one of compassion, rightfulness, and love even in the midst of their world, which was filled with affliction, and injustice. The songs' stories show imaginative talent in their quest to overcome their oppression. Using unique rhythms that reveal their African roots and putting them together with words that proclaim hope and bravery, they announce overcoming and wholeness.

*Mary Had a Baby* celebrates the birth of Jesus, the Christ, who brings salvation from slavery of every kind. This spiritual focuses on the gift of the Christ Child, but it is a celebration of mother and child also. First the call, an announcement: *Mary had a baby!* Then the response of appreciation and awe: *Oh my Lord*. Each following verse moves the story on with first a question verse and then an answer verse: *What did she name him? She called him Jesus. Where was He born? Born in a stable. Where did they lay Him? They laid Him in a manger.*

The refrain, *The people keep a-comin' and the train done gone*, ends every verse. Trains represented a new opportunity in the blossoming industrial age of the early nineteenth century. They reached and linked places. And they offered a way out. Train imagery figures prominently

## CELEBRATION

in African American legends and one can easily understand why. There were also real trains of the Underground Railroad: “the freedom train,” “the lonesome train,” “the gospel train.” These represented the real trains that ran mile after mile, taking passengers from station to station to physical freedom. What did the slaves mean by placing the image of Mary’s newborn baby beside that of a train station? I have read that the phrase *The people keep a-comin’ and the train done gone* probably included a spiritual warning. After all, Mary’s baby represents rebirth, liberty, and rescue so do not miss your opportunity to worship Him.

I have read also that awe and wonder at Jesus’ birth are side by side with reality in the spiritual. Winter, and Christmas in particular, was one of the best times to attempt an escape from slavery. Christmas was the one time of year on plantations when work was relaxed while owners and their families celebrated, which gave slaves the perfect opportunity to escape. If you remember the TV Miniseries, *Roots* (1977), you understand how important it was for runaways to get to the meeting place on time. Don’t be late! Or the train will be gone.

**“Take the first step in faith.  
You don’t have to see the whole staircase,  
just take the first step.”**

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

*17*

***O Come All Ye Faithful***

**Faith can move mountains but most likely  
a spadeful at a time.**

**Anonymous**

# CELEBRATION

## O Come, All Ye Faithful

Latin: John F. Wade, 1711-1786  
Tr. Frederick Oakeley, 1802-1880, and others

ADESTE FIDELES Irregular  
John F. Wade's "Cantus Diversi," 1751

1 O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant, O  
2 Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion,  
3 Child, for us sin - ners poor and in the man - ger,  
4 Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py morn - ing,

come ye, O come ye to Beth - le - hem;  
Sing, all ye cit - i - zens of heaven a - bove!  
We would em - brace thee, with love and awe;  
Je - sus, to thee be all glo - ry given;

Come and be - hold him, born the King of an - gels;  
Glo - ry to God, all glo - ry in the high - est;  
Who would not love thee, lov - ing us so dear - ly?  
Word of the Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing;

O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him,

## **O Come All Ye Faithful**

This popular Christmas carol, originally known as *Adeste Fideles*, has been translated many times in many different cultures. At least in France and maybe other countries as well, this Latin carol was sung by members of religious orders as they processed through the streets, calling people to the sanctuaries for midnight mass.

The words for the carol were written in Latin by John Francis Wade in 1743 and translated into English by Frederick Oakeley, beginning around 1841.

The music composition has been attributed variously but the earliest existing manuscript shows the melody we sing today as well as the words and lists John Wade as both lyricist and music composer. It was published in the 1760 edition of *Evening Offices of the Church*. John Francis Wade included it in his own publication of *Cantus Diversi* in 1761.

John Francis Wade, a Roman Catholic layman, was driven out of England in the mid 1700's. Because of suppression, many Catholics fled to France and Portugal at this time and settled colonies of English-speaking Catholics. Wade taught music in the famous Roman Catholic College and Ministry Center in Douay, France. He was renowned as a copyist of musical scores by hand and his work was considered exquisite. When Wade introduced a copy of a Latin Christmas carol beginning with the phrase *Adeste Fideles, Laeti triumphantes*, historians believed he had only discovered an ancient hymn by an unknown author. Most scholars now believe Wade himself wrote the lyrics. Seven original hand-copied manuscripts of this Latin hymn have been found and all of them are signed by John Wade.

Eventually English Catholics began returning to Britain, carrying Wade's Christmas carol with them. Much later in the early 1800's, an

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Anglican minister named Rev. Frederick Oakeley, who preached at Margaret Street Chapel in London, came across Wade's Latin Christmas carol and translated it into English for use at his church, the Margaret Street Chapel. At that time, the first line of his translation read *Ye Faithful, Approach Ye*. Unfortunately, these words did not catch on with the Street Chapel people, but several years later, after Oakley converted to Catholicism, he came up with *O come All Ye Faithful, Joyful and Triumphant*, his Latin improving as he studied for the priesthood.

And there you have it! Two brave Englishmen, Catholics, lovers of the Christmas story and its promise for man, living a hundred years apart, and writing in two different nations, combined their talents to bid us come, joyful and triumphant, adore Him.

**“Christmas is the day that holds all time together.”**

**Alexander Smith**



***Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer***

**“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be  
defeated.**

**In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats,  
So you can know who you are, what you can rise from,  
How you can still come out of it.”**

**Maya Angelou**

*CELEBRATION*



## **Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer**

Rudolph and his unique Nose came to life in 1939. The Christmas song of the same name was released in 1949, ten years later, topping off a story of family and heart. It appears that it is true, the story of Rudolph was written for commercial purposes but it is clear that love, respect, and incredible generosity played a large part in the success of this creation and its subsequent immortalization.

By 1939, Montgomery Ward stores had bought and distributed coloring books to customers as a promotional activity at Christmas time for many years. That year, an executive at the Montgomery Ward store in Chicago decided it would be more economical to create their own giveaway book. Robert L. May was a copywriter for the Chicago store. I have read that May was known among his coworkers for writing children's stories. True or not, May was asked to create a booklet that could serve as the giveaway.

Much has been written about May drawing on his own background for the booklet's story, that of a small, shy and therefore often-taunted child. Again, true or not, May drew Rudolph as an underdog, a misfit with a physical abnormality (a bright red nose that actually glowed) who was teased and ostracized. It seems though that May's boss was concerned about featuring a reindeer with a red nose. After all, bright red noses are a classic characteristic of drunkards which just would not be appropriate for a Christmas story that was to be given to children! Somehow May won the day, and *Rudolph* became so popular that by 1946 six million copies had been distributed, even with World War II paper shortages curtailing printing for several of those years.

Demand for licensing *Rudolph* was enormous but that would not help May, who did not hold the copyright. He received no royalties, something May desperately needed because he was still deeply in debt from medical bills incurred during his wife's terminal illness – she died around the time he wrote *Rudolph*. Something persuaded Ward's

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corporate president, Sewell Avery, to give the copyright to May in January 1947, an incredibly generous action that assured May's financial security for the first time in his life. *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* was printed commercially that same year and a nine-minute cartoon was released the following year. Even more was to come: the Rudolph phenomenon really took off when songwriter Johnny Marks, May's new brother-in-law, developed both lyrics and melody to turn the Rudolph story into a song. It was recorded by Gene Autry and sold two million copies the first year, going on to become one of the best-selling songs of all time. Lastly, a television special narrated by Burl Ives was produced in 1964 and remains a popular U.S. holiday favorite today.

This fun song built around a lovable creature who garners public affection just by being an "under-reindeer," teaches us that we can overcome and besides, being different is not a bad thing. Actually, being different can be a blessing.

**"What we have once enjoyed we can never lose.  
All that we love deeply become a part of us."**

**Helen Keller**

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*Silent Night*

**“The time draws near the birth of Christ:  
The moon is hid; the night is still;  
The Christmas bells from hill to hill  
Answer each other in the mist.....”**

**Alfred Lord Tennyson  
*Christmas Poem***

# CELEBRATION

## Silent Night, Holy Night

Joseph Mohr, 1792-1848  
Tr. John F. Young, 1820-1885

STILLE NACHT Irregular  
Franz Gruber, 1787-1863

1 Si - lent night, ho - ly night, All is calm, all is bright  
2 Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Shep-herds quake at the sight,  
3 Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God, love's pure light

Round yon vir - gin moth-er and child. Ho - ly in - fant so ten - der and mild,  
Glo - ries stream from heav-en a - far, Heaven-ly hosts sing al - le - lu - ia;  
Ra - diant beams from thy ho-ly face, With the dawn of re - deem - ing grace,

Sleep in heav-en-ly peace, Sleep in heav-en-ly peace.  
Christ, the Sav - ior, is born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!  
Je - sus, Lord, at thy birth, Je - sus, Lord, at thy birth.

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## Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht

Joseph Mohr, 1792-1848

STILLE NACHT Irregular  
Franz Gruber, 1787-1863

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!<br/>Alles schläft, einsam wacht<br/>Nur das traute, hochheilige Paar<br/>Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,<br/>Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,<br/>Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!</p> | <p>2 Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!<br/>Hirten erst kundgemacht<br/>Durch der Engel Halleluja,<br/>Tönt es laut von fern und nah:<br/>Christ der Retter ist da,<br/>Christ der Retter ist da!</p> |
|---|---|
- 3 Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!  
Gottes Sohn, o wie lacht  
Lieb' aus deinem göttlichen Mund,  
Da uns schlägt die rettende Stund':  
Christ, in deiner Geburt,  
Christ, in deiner Geburt!

## **Silent Night**

As legend has it, if the old church organ had been working or if the organist had not been able to pluck a guitar, this simple but powerful Christmas carol, which has become a vital part of Christmas celebrations everywhere, might never have been written.

Twenty-six-year old Father Joseph Mohr, assistant priest at the newly erected Church of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, a village near Salzburg in the Austrian Alps, was far from happy when his organist and friend, Franz Gruber, told him that the organ could not be used for the special Christmas Eve Mass scheduled for December 24, 1818. Father Mohr was not pleased at the prospects of a Midnight Mass without the traditional organ music.

To relieve his tension, he bundled himself up and went visiting among his humble people. Shortly after arriving at the home of one of his faithful families, a new baby was born to the poor laborer and his wife. The pastor compared that event with the birth of the Christ Child centuries earlier, and, upon arriving home a few hours later, he polished an earlier draft of four simple stanzas describing the wonder and majesty of the first Christmas. He then handed Gruber the new stanzas and a guitar asking him "Try your hand at this." The more Gruber protested, the stronger Mohr insisted. To quiet his friend, Gruber strummed a few simple chords and soon was humming a melody that seemed to express the sentiments of the poem perfectly. At midnight the new carol was sung for the first time.

It might have remained there at Oberndorf had not Karl Mauracher come to repair the organ early in 1819. Gruber played the new carol for the famous organ builder and repairman, who fell in love with it. He took a copy with him and distributed it throughout the Alpine region of Austria.

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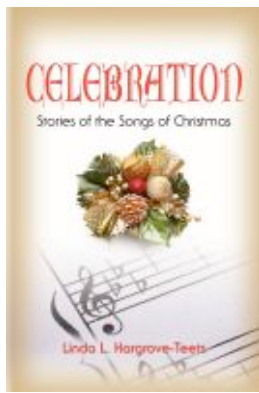
About ten years later, the four gifted Strasser children gave the new song to the world. Their parents were makers of fine gloves and drummed up business at fairs and festivals with the children singing in front of their booth. They called the new carol *The Song from Heaven* and sang it wherever they went, including a royal performance for the King and Queen, creating an immediate sensation and guaranteeing its fame.

It was sung simultaneously in French, English and German by troops fighting in WWI during the Christmas truce of 1914 as it was a song that all soldiers knew.

**“Christmas is the one time...when people of all religions  
come together to worship Jesus Christ.”**

**Bart Simpson**





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