

# Carol Stories

## **Backgrounds to some of our popular carols, their authors and composers**

**Angels from the realms of glory  
As with gladness men of old  
Born in the night, Mary's child  
Brightest and best of the sons of the morning  
Christians, awake, salute the happy morn  
Come, thou long-expected Jesus  
Cradled in a manger, meanly  
Good King Wenceslas  
Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
In the bleak midwinter  
It came upon the midnight clear  
It was on a starry night  
Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness  
Lo, he comes with clouds descending  
Long ago, prophets knew  
Love came down at Christmas  
O come, all ye faithful  
O come, O come Immanuel  
O little town of Bethlehem  
Of the Father's love begotten  
Once in royal David's city  
See, amid the winter's snow  
See him lying on a bed of straw (Calypso Carol)  
Silent night, holy night  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
The angel Gabriel from heaven came  
Unto us a boy is born  
While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
Who would think that what was needed  
Wise men, seeking Jesus**

**Martin Rider**

**“Angels from the realms of glory” by James Montgomery (1771 – 1854)**

This carol often causes embarrassment for the unwary, because the ‘come’ in the chorus takes a lot of breath and the chorus is often printed as, *‘Come and worship, / Worship Christ, the new-born King’*, whereas when it is sung the first time, we only sing, *‘Come and worship, / Christ, the new-born King’*, so someone, usually me, insists on trying to fit in ‘Worship’ – and fails. Having said that, the hymn is a favourite of mine and it was written by a remarkable man, James Montgomery, whose statue still stands in Sheffield, where he spent most of his life as a radical newspaper editor and proprietor. James’ parents were missionaries who moved from Scotland to the West Indies where they died of Yellow Fever.

James was sent to a strict Moravian boarding school near Leeds, where he failed to shine academically and so found himself apprenticed in a bakery, but hated it so much that he ran away and eventually became a clerk at a radical newspaper, known as “The Sheffield Register”. The owner, Joseph Gales was a plain-speaking liberal and was forced to flee the country when his opinions led to his persecution. James admired Mr. Gales, so he first took over as editor, then became the owner, changing the paper’s name to “The Sheffield Iris” He was no respecter of authority and was twice imprisoned, once for celebrating the fall of the Bastille and, later, for condemning the brutality of the militia when it dealt with a riot in Sheffield. His newspaper constantly supported the downtrodden and exploited, opposed slavery, poor sanitation, bad housing, the use of boy chimney sweeps and State Lotteries, but supported the teaching of reading and writing in Sunday Schools (State education did not exist until 1871).

One thing that caused him to be furious was the opposition of some Anglican churches to the singing of hymns, rather than metrical Psalms and Thomas Cotterill, Rector of St. Paul’s Sheffield, had to go to the Ecclesiastical Court at York to obtain the Archbishop’s permission for a hymnal which contained some of James’ works to be used, following an attempt by the St. Paul’s congregation to have it prohibited. The Archbishop of York allowed it to be used on condition that it was first vetted and the hymnal dedicated to him.

James Montgomery declared at a banquet in his honour, ‘I wrote neither to suit the manners, the taste, nor the temper of the age, I sang of war – but it was a war of freedom in which death was preferred to chains. I sang the love which man ought to bear his brother ..... I sang to love of virtue. I sang, too, the love of God, who is love’. Of the four hundred or more hymns James wrote, several are not only still sung regularly, but are popular, too: ‘Lord, teach us to pray aright’ and ‘Hail to the Lord’s anointed’ are good examples.

“Angels from the realms of Glory” was first printed in 1816 in “The Sheffield Iris”, entitled ‘Nativity’. It is sung to ‘Iris’ a Flemish melody arranged by Martin Shaw and echoing the name of James’ newspaper.

**“As with gladness men of old” by William Chatterton Dix {1837 - 1898}**

William Chatterton Dix was born in Bristol and attended the city’s grammar school before finding employment in marine insurance with a Glasgow company. He was obviously successful, for he rose to become its company manager, but he was also a committed Christian and enjoyed writing hymns, some of which he published in ‘Hymns of Love and Joy’ in 1861. Included in this collection was “As with gladness men of old”, which he wrote at Epiphany, 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1860. On that day, William was most frustrated, for he was too poorly to attend the services at St. Raphael’s church. Consequently, although housebound, he decided to read the account of the travels of the Magi in St. Matthew’s gospel, so he took up his Bible and read chapter 2 verses 1 to 12. Soon afterwards, an idea came to him of using the example of the Wise Men for all Christians through a poem, and, before he went to sleep that night, he had written out the words of “As with gladness men of old”. Several authors have shared this experience of being ‘guided’ by the Holy Spirit and a number of special hymns, like ‘O Love that wilt not let me go’, ‘O perfect Love’ and ‘Abide with me’ have been written as quickly as the one Mr. Dix produced. I particularly like the third stanza with its idea of offering our best spiritual gifts without seeking reward, except for the pure pleasure of serving the infant Jesus:

**‘ As they offered gifts most rare  
At thy cradle 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.’**

Mr. Dix wrote a number of hymns which are sung today, including ‘To thee, O Lord, our hearts we raise’ and ‘Alleluia! Sing to Jesus,’ the latter an excellent communion hymn which he wrote in 1866. The former, ‘To thee, O Lord, our hearts we raise’, inspired no less a composer than Sir Arthur Sullivan to set it to ‘Golden Sheaves’ in 1874, then to ‘Bishopgarth’ at the request of Queen Victoria in 1897.

‘As with gladness men of old’ was set to a tune written in 1838 by the German Conrad Kocher, which was part of a choral melody, ‘Treuer Heiland, wir sind hier’. It was adapted by the great W.H. Monk for the first edition of ‘Hymns Ancient and Modern’ (1861) and called ‘Dix’ in honour of the writer of the words. However, Mr. Dix was not very fond of the tune which is a shame. A lovely descant for verse 5 was composed in 1976 by John Wilson, though it must be said that Mr. Wilson created the tune for Fred Kaan’s “Christ is coming, Christ has come,” which is also set to “Dix”, not for “As with gladness”.

Conrad Kocher was born in 1786 and was influenced greatly by Mozart and Haydn, before he went to study in Rome under Palestrina and began to try to reform church music in Germany. In 1821 he founded a School of Sacred Song in his native Stuttgart which concentrated on four part singing and he became the organist of the Stiftskirche between 1827 and 1865. Although little is heard of Mr. Kocher’s works in this country, he not only revised several hymnals, but wrote an oratorio, two operas and countless chorales in an extremely active life. If the only contribution we have in “Hymns and Psalms” is ‘Dix’, then I beg to differ with Mr. Dix’s opinion of the melody, for I enjoy both words and tune! Think of the last verse, with its undertone of the Book of Revelation:

**‘In the heavenly country bright  
Need they no created light;  
Thou its light, its joy, its crown,  
Thou its sun which goes not down;  
There for ever may we sing  
Alleluias to our king.’**

Magnificent, yet so simple!

**‘Born in the night, Mary’s child,’ by Geoffrey Ainger (1925 – 2013)**

Geoffrey Ainger was born in Mistle, Essex, on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1925, was educated at Bracondale School in Norwich, at Richmond College, London, then at the Union Theological Seminary, New York, from which he emerged as a Methodist minister.

During a varied ministry, he spent nine years as part of a team ministry at Notting Hill in the 1960s, when it was a very deprived area. He ended his career in the South East London Methodist Circuit, before retiring to Staffordshire, where he died on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2013.

This hymn was written in 1960, whilst Revd. Geoffrey Ainger was a Methodist minister at Loughton, Essex and was first published in “Songs from Notting Hill” in 1964. The theme reflected Revd. Ainger’s concern for homeless in the area – an official indifference to the plight of people who lacked a roof over their heads. The melody of ‘Born in the night’ was originally for a guitar, but it has been adapted for keyboards and other instruments.

**‘Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,’ by Reginald Heber {1783 - 1826}**

Several Years ago, early on a Sunday morning, a programme on Radio 4 captured my imagination and may have sown the seed of my interest in hymn stories. “**Brightest and Best**” not only played hymns, but gave a little history about their background, too. Naturally, its theme song was ‘Epiphany Hymn’, Joseph Thrupp’s setting for ‘Brightest and best of the sons of the morning’, so this hymn has a special place in my affections.

The author of the hymn, Reginald Heber was born into a wealthy Cheshire family, for whom culture and service were important. He went to Whitchurch Grammar School in Shropshire and then to Brasenose College, Oxford, before becoming a Fellow of All Souls when he was only twenty two. His poem, ‘Palestine’ won the Newdigate Prize, as a result of which he became a friend of Robert Southey and Sir Walter Scott when he contributed to the literary journal, ‘The Quarterly Review’. In 1807 he became vicar of Hodnet in Shropshire, where he worked with Henry Milman to produce hymns to fit the liturgy of the church year. Whilst at Hodnet, Reginald Heber wrote fifty seven hymns that were published in “Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year”, in 1827, one year after his premature death.

It was almost inevitable that as gifted and conscientious a man as Rev. Heber should rise in the Church and so it was that he was appointed Bishop of Calcutta in 1823. However, his duties were not confined to that one city, as his title implies, but instead to much of the South Pacific, including Ceylon and Australia, for he was the only Anglican Bishop in that hemisphere. {The Church of England has had a habit of giving misleading titles to bishoprics; for example William Walsham How was appointed Bishop of Bedford, he discovered that his See was East London}. Bishop Heber was a modest and conscientious man, whose sense of duty drove him to travel tirelessly during his three years as Bishop. The heat and hard work took their toll of his health and he died aged only forty two, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1826, eighteen days short of his forty-third birthday. The circumstances of his death were tragic: he had just preached a sermon at Trichinopoly, in which he denounced the caste system before a large congregation; he decided to cool off in the swimming pool of the house where he was a guest; shortly afterwards he suffered a stroke whilst swimming there and he drowned before anyone realised what had happened.

Of his hymns the best known are ‘Holy, holy, holy!’ and ‘Brightest and best of the sons of the morning’. In the fourth verse of the latter Bishop Heber expressed the same sentiments as Christina Rossetti in the final stanza of her later hymn, ‘In the Bleak Midwinter’,

**Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would his favour secure;  
Richer by far is the heart’s adoration;  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.**

The last two lines refer to Psalm 34 and I can almost hear Amos saying amen to this verse, which concurs with his,

**I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

*Amos Ch. 5 vs. 21- 24*

The usual settings for 'Brightest and best of the sons of the morning' are 'Spean' by J.F. Bridge, so named because he loved to fish on the River Spean in Scotland, or 'Jesmian' by George Thalben - Ball, who was born in Sydney before his Cornish parents returned to Britain, where he became organist of the Temple Church after Walford Davies, and later became music adviser to the B.B.C.. However, I still prefer J. F. Thrupp's 'Epiphany Hymn', which was used in the 1933 'Methodist Hymn Book' and which was especially composed for Heber's hymn. Apparently, the great Samuel Sebastian Wesley also wrote a tune called 'Epiphany' specifically for 'Brightest and best', but I haven't heard that version, so if any organist reads this and can help, I would appreciate it.

### **“Christians, awake, salute the happy morn” by John Byrom (1692 – 1763)**

There can be few questions more rash than to ask an average eleven year-old what he or she would like for Christmas nowadays. It an invitation to empty your wallet or, perhaps, to make your 'flexible friend' feel the strain. Fortunately for John Byrom, things were different in 1749, because his daughter, Dolly, was not as materialistic as contemporary children are encouraged to be by advertisers. She asked only for a poem written by her father. I don't think I would have got away with a poem when my children were eleven, though to be fair they have never been too demanding.

I suppose it would not have been a surprise when, at breakfast on Christmas Day 1749, Dolly found a scroll, bound with red ribbon, at her place on the table. When she opened the scroll, she found the words of "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn". I hope John Byrom bought her something else, but whether or not he did so, young Dolly showed off the poem to friends and acquaintances, one of whom was John Wainwright, the organist at Stockport Parish Church where the Byroms worshipped. He must have been impressed, for he secretly decided to convert the poem into a Christmas carol for the following Christmas.

At one minute past midnight on Christmas Day 1750, the Byrom household was roused from sleep by Mr. Wainwright and his choir singing "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn" outside their house. I trust that John Byrom was gracious enough to rise, dress and offer due hospitality to the singers, even though he may well have been exhausted. Moreover, it is as well that John Wainwright found the correct house: otherwise they might have received the contents of a chamber pot for their pains, Christmas Day or not!

From this small beginning one of our favourite carols came into being. In the circumstances, it ought to be the last hymn of watchnight services, timed so that it is sung on the stroke of midnight – or is that a little too ambitious? I particularly like how the carol retells Luke's nativity story in the first four stanzas, then encourages us to dwell upon the real significance of the birth in the last two verses. I hasten to add that the original poem was modified from its fifty-two lines to forty-eight by the time it was published, posthumously, in "Miscellaneous Poems", 1773. It is believed that it was further redacted to something like its current form by James Montgomery when he published it in "Cotterill's Selection of Psalms and Hymns for Public and Private Use", in 1819, for use in St. Paul's and St. James' churches, Sheffield. As with a number of excellent hymns of its era, it found its way into "Hymns Ancient and Modern", 1861 and has remained popular ever since.

What do we know about John Byrom? Well, he was born in February 1692 in Kelsall by Manchester, to a landed family. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, studied medicine at Montpellier, but does not seem to have gone into practice. Instead he developed a forerunner of the Pitman Shorthand System and taught it professionally in London. Two of his students were John and Charles Wesley, who used Byrom's shorthand in their journals, for which we Methodists are duly grateful! He was elected to the Royal Society in 1723 and, upon the death of his elder brother a year later, he returned to Manchester to run the family estates.

With his educational background, he was able to hold his own in theological discussions with the Wesleys and he was a frequent contributor to "The Spectator". He was also quite imposing to look at, as he was tall and favoured smart, bright clothes – unlike the Wesleys and traditional Methodists.

John Byrom seems only to have written this one carol before he passed away in September 1763. Interestingly, he was a Jacobite sympathiser, supporting the Stuart dynasty, at a time when Bonnie Prince Charlie made such sympathies most unpopular south of the border. Having said that, Susanna Wesley would have shared his viewpoint, for it was a bitter point of contention between her and her husband, Revd. Samuel Wesley, who favoured William of Orange.

Like John Byrom, John Wainwright's melody for "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn" was a one-off. John Wainwright was born in Stockport on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1723, became a 'singing man' at what has become Manchester Cathedral – it was then the Collegiate Church – and deputy organist two years later, in 1748. Some time between 1749 and 1750, he became organist at Stockport Parish Church, then was appointed as chief organist at the Collegiate Church, Manchester between 1767 and his death on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1768. The tune he composed was originally called 'Mortram', almost certainly a misspelling of 'Mottram', which is near Stockport. In modern hymn books, the tune is called Yorkshire (Stockport), though how Yorkshire has attached itself is quite beyond me, unless someone mistakenly thought the hymn had originated in Sheffield, after James Montgomery's inclusion of "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn" in "Cotterills Selection" for those two Sheffield churches. I think it is time for me to go and lie down in a darkened room again! Before I do so, here is an extra titbit: John Wainwright had two sons, Robert and Richard, both of whom were organists at the Collegiate Church. Robert, however, composed two hymn tunes included in "Hymns and Psalms": 'St. Gregory' for Wesley's "With glorious clouds encompassed round" and 'Manchester' for "Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove" by Isaac Watts.

### **"Come thou long-expected Jesus" by Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)**

Charles Wesley is one of hymnody's most prolific writers, having written approximately six thousand hymns, many of which, deservedly, still feature in current hymn books. He wrote 'Come, thou long-expected Jesus,' in 1744 and he based it on the accounts of the Annunciation in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. However, he has extended God's salvation from "thy people" to "all the earth", to "every nation", rather than a select few, for one of the central tenets of Methodism is that salvation is offered to everybody as God's free gift of grace. Notice, too, that Jesus comes not as an earthly ruler, but as One who rules our hearts, for God's kingdom is not a geographical, nor a political area, but exists wherever Christ rules our hearts, minds and lives. It first appeared in "Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord" and was intended as a Christmas hymn, though it serves wonderfully as an Advent hymn.

Two melodies are commonly used for "Come, thou long-expected Jesus" the first being "Stuttgart" from C.F. Witt's 'Harmonia Sacra' as adapted by Henry Gauntlett for the first edition of "Hymns Ancient and Modern" in 1861, though it was spelled 'Stutgard'. It was first associated with "Come, thou long-expected Jesus" in the 1889 "Primitive Methodist Hymnal" and has remained a popular choice since then. A rival melody is John Stainer's "Cross of Jesus" which was used for the oratorio, 'The Crucifixion' in 1887, but which was linked to this carol from 1916.

### **"Cradled in a manger, meanly" by George Stringer Rowe {1830 – 1913}**

In many ways, this beautiful carol is truly a Methodist hymn, if only because it appears in few hymnals outside Methodism. Moreover, both the author and one of the composers of its setting were Wesleyan Methodist ministers. George Stringer Rowe was born in Margate during 1830. He clearly felt a strong call to the ministry, for he went to Didsbury, near Manchester to be trained and was ordained when only twenty three years old. There are few details about where he served, but he rose to become the Professor of Pastoral Theology at Headingley College in Leeds during 1888. Before that, he edited a missionary magazine for children, called "Home and Abroad" for more than a decade. It was in a Christmas edition of this publication that he published "Cradled in a manger, meanly", some time before 1879, for it appeared in "The Methodist Sunday School Hymn Book", of 1879 – a Wesleyan hymnal – and, later, in "The Primitive Methodist Sunday School Hymnal" of 1901.

It was selected for both the 1904 and 1933 editions of “The Methodist Hymn Book”, but was not received by other denominations until 1957, when it was published in “Christian Praise” and, a year later, in “Sunday School Praise”. It is included in “Hymns and Psalms”, so I trust that it will continue to be sung by future generations of Methodists, if not by all Christians. As far as I know, this is the only surviving hymn by Rev. Rowe, who passed away in 1913 at Bromley, Kent, but I rate it most highly, for unlike many ‘Christmas card’ carols, it is unsentimental, does not gloss over the squalor, stench and deprivation into which God allowed his Son to enter our world. I believe that by creating an orderly, sterile picture of the nativity, we do God a disservice, for part of the Christmas message is that God not only loves us sinners enough to have sent his Son into the world, but he also sent him without any privileges, so that he shared the hardship of the poor and displaced, rather than silk sheets in a palace.

The carol explains why God sent Jesus in humble circumstances; to take his shalom – complete blessings – to all people, not just the Establishment in Judah and it not only invites Christ to ‘Make a Christmas in my heart’, but seeks to evangelise by wishing that those who have never heard the story of Jesus’ nativity might do so, in order that everyone might share in the blessing.

“Hymns and Psalms” has two tunes for the carol, the first of which is “Saltash”, by an unknown composer, possibly American, for it was first used in Joshua Leavitt’s “Christian Lyre” (1830) to the hymn ‘Now the Saviour stands a-pleading.’ It was used for a number of hymns, but was only set to “Cradled in a manger, meanly” for the 1957 “Christian Praise”. I prefer the second setting, “St. Winifred” by Rev. Sidney Dunman, for though its higher notes challenge some congregations (and preachers with Christmastide colds), it was composed specifically for the carol in the 1879 edition of the Wesleyan “Methodist Sunday School Hymn Book” and it sets off George Rowe’s words to great effect. It is generally the preferred setting, having even ousted George Brockless’ ‘Oran na Prasaich’ which was written for the “School Hymn Book of the Methodist Church” in 1950 as the only setting for “Cradled in a manger, meanly”.

Sidney Joseph Palmer Dunman was born in Bridgwater, Somerset in 1843, became a Wesleyan minister in 1864 and died in Bristol on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1913 – five months before George Rowe. Rev. Dunman was a member of the music committee for the 1877 edition of “Wesley’s Hymns”, in addition to which he composed several tunes for the hymn book. He also contributed music for the 1881 “Methodist Sunday School Tune-Book”, but only “St. Winifred” is used in “The Methodist Hymn Book”, 1933 and “Hymns and Psalms”. I regard the melody with affection and gratitude, for it has inspired me to write two of my own carols to it!

### **“Good King Wenceslas” by John Mason Neale {1818 – 1866}**

This is one of the United Kingdom’s best-known Christmas carols, although it does not refer to the birth of Jesus and it was dismissed very shortly in “The Oxford Book of Carols” as no more than ‘doggerel’, ‘commonplace to the last degree’. The critic added that he hoped it would ‘gradually pass into disuse’, but the carol has long outlived its detractor, pompous fellow that he was! I suppose that Methodists do not approve of it, for it has not been included in either the 1933 “Methodist Hymn Book”, nor in “Hymns and Psalms”; perhaps we are pompous, too. I certainly used it with success in a Christmas Songs of Praise at my church a year or two ago, for I can see considerable virtue in the work and I shall continue to sing it whenever the opportunity presents itself, whatever critics say.

The carol was written by a great British hymn-writer of the Nineteenth Century, John Mason Neale, who was born in London during 1818. John was a poor mathematician, so he could only receive an ordinary degree from Trinity College, Cambridge. Nevertheless, he was elected a Fellow of Downing College before taking Holy Orders in 1843, becoming vicar at Crawley in Sussex. Respiratory problems forced him to leave after only six weeks at his parish and for the next three years he travelled to Madeira for the winter, immersing himself in architecture, liturgy and, although he never travelled there, he studied the Eastern Orthodox Churches. As a result, he became a real expert in ecclesiastical matters. In 1846 John Neale was appointed Warden of Sackville College, which was a decayed and run-down alms house for twenty elderly men. He immediately began to take steps to restore the place to something like its original condition, despite his pitiful stipend of £28 per annum.

He was High Church by inclination and practice, so when someone reported him for 'Romish activities', the Bishop of Chichester banned him from practising throughout the diocese, a ban that lasted fourteen years. Despite problems with the Bishop and opponents at Sackville, Revd. Neale studied and wrote a great deal. He produced histories, children's books and a host of hymns, some of which were most scholarly translations from Latin and Greek. His hymns covered the Church Year, including "The day of resurrection", "Come, ye faithful, raise the strain", "O come, O come, Immanuel", "All glory, laud and honour", "Jerusalem the Golden" and, not least of all, "Good King Wenceslas"! Such was his output that, one eighth of a version of "Hymns Ancient and Modern" were his compositions, yet suspicions about his practices meant that he was only offered preferment once: to be Provost of the Scottish Episcopal Cathedral in Perth, which he declined on health grounds.

However, besides his hymns, John Mason Neale left a lasting legacy; the St. Margaret's Sisterhood, a convent in East Grinstead whose members dedicated their lives to nurse the sick in their own homes. After he died in 1866, aged only forty-eight, Ermenild, one of John Mason Neale's daughters later became the Mother of St. Margaret's, continuing what he had established. On his coffin was an inscription of his own, written in Latin: **J.M. Neale miser et indignus sacerdos requiescens sib signo Thau – J.M. Neale poor and unworthy priest resting under the sign of the Cross.**

Perhaps it would be appropriate to finish by considering King Wenceslas and why he was 'good'. He was born in Tenth Century Bohemia, part of the former Czech Republic. Wenceslas succeeded his father as King when he was barely twenty and was murdered at his brother's castle when he was only twenty-two. Despite his short reign, Wenceslas instituted many changes to his country. He was a committed Christian, so he had a church built in every city in Bohemia and read daily prayers at his own castle's services. It is recorded that he was generous to the poor, to widows and orphans. He also ransomed prisoners, especially priests, besides which he was a generous host.

King Wenceslas must have been well ahead of his time, for while we in Britain were still using trial by ordeal, he banned torture and abolished capital punishment. The cynical side of my nature moots darkly that such goodness often leads to personal disaster, which it did at the murderous hand of one of his own family. Thus, apart from a square named in his honour – and this carol – the name of Wenceslas the Good might have faded into the mists of history.

Did he go out with his page to assist a poor man gathering wood by St. Agnes' fountain? I do not know whether or not Revd. Neale had an historic event upon which to base his carol, but it is in keeping with his character and the example of unforced love – grace – is surely admirable for anyone, Christian or not! Whatever the case may be, this carol has a particular purpose – as a means of generating warm-hearted giving.

**Remember that John Mason Neale not only had to try to restore Sackville College, (which his meagre stipend and large family prevented him from doing out of his own pocket), but he needed funds to help the residents, too. Thus, they would have visited local gentry on Boxing Day / St. Stephen's Day, singing carols before passing round a collection plate. "Good King Wenceslas" not only shows the virtue of giving, but has these closing lines:**

**'Therefore, Christians all, be sure,**

**Wealth or rank possessing,**

**Ye who now will bless the poor,**

**Shall yourselves find blessing.'** (*Rattle the collecting plate or tin!!!*)

***Do you see the point now?***



**“Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,” by Philip Doddridge {1702 – 1751}**

Philip Doddridge was born in London on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1702, the youngest of twenty children born to a successful merchant and his wife. Despite suffering ill-health as a child, Philip was such a successful student at a school in St. Albans, the Duchess of Bedford offered to sponsor him through university, provided he took holy orders. However, Philip’s paternal grandfather, Revd. John Doddridge, had refused to accept the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and, as a result, was ejected from his living, along with many other dissenting priests. It is hardly surprising that Philip politely declined her Ladyship’s offer and, instead, he attended Kibworth Academy, in Hinckley, for as with Isaac Watts, dissenters were barred from receiving a degree, even assuming a university in the United Kingdom would accept him as a student. Following his graduation in 1723, he became a minister in Leicestershire, before moving to the Congregational Meeting House in Northampton during 1729.

Philip Doddridge’s was a social ministry, for he threw himself into helping the community, especially the poor and disadvantaged in the town. In 1730, he inaugurated an Academy in Northampton, at which John Wesley occasionally lectured and in 1738 he started a charity school and, five years later, was one of the founders of Northampton Infirmary. Strangely, for a dissenting clergyman, in 1745 Philip Doddridge raised and organised a local militia to defend Northampton should the army of “The Young Pretender”, Prince Charles Edward Stuart, have reach as far south as the town, which, fortunately if you are English, Charles failed to do. Despite a heavy workload, Philip Doddridge found time to write at least three hundred and seventy hymns and a paper, “The Rise and Progress of Religion in the soul”, which proved fertile ground for evangelicals.

‘Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,’ was his attempt to highlight his Advent Sermon of 1735, based upon Luke chapter 4 verses 18 and 19. It was originally seven stanzas long, though the following three are generally omitted – I think you’ll see why:

- 2. On Him the Spirit largely poured  
Exerts its sacred fire;  
Wisdom and might and zeal and love  
His Holy breast inspire.**
- 4. He comes, from the thick films of vice  
To clear the mental ray,  
And on the eyeballs of the blind  
To pour celestial day.**
- 6. His silver trumpets publish loud  
The Jub’lee of the Lord;  
Our debts are all remitted now,  
Our heritage restored.**

There is some evidence that Revd. Doddridge was influenced by Alexander Pope’s “Messiah” for the fourth stanza, ( with its ‘mental ray’ and pouring ‘celestial day’ upon ‘the eyeballs of the blind’), but the remaining four verses of “Hark the glad sound!” are ideal for Advent services, especially with its usual setting, Thomas Ravenscroft’s “Bristol”, written for Psalms 16 and 64 in 1621, but used by the editors of “Hymns Ancient and Modern” (1861) as a melody for Philip’s hymn. Thomas Ravenscroft was born in 1590, became Music Master at Christ’s Hospital between 1618 and 1622, publishing in 1621 “The Whole Booke of Psalmes”, which contained a hundred and five tunes that became the standard musical settings for Psalms in England.

Other hymns that Philip Doddridge wrote include: “Jesus, my Lord, how rich thy grace,” “The Saviour, when to heaven he rose,” “Ye servants of the Lord”, “Great God, we sing that mighty hand”, “O God of Bethel, by whose hand”, “See Israel’s gentle Shepherd stand,” “O happy day that fixed my choice” (radically improved by a chorus and a rousing melody for revivalist meetings by Messrs. Moody and Sankey) and “My gracious Lord, I own thy right”. This prolific hymn-writer and very active worker for social wellbeing died in Lisbon on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1751, aged only forty-nine. When my daughter studied at the University College of Northampton, I noticed that there is a Philip Doddridge Centre near the centre of town – I am sure he’d have approved.

## **“Hark! The herald angels sing” by Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)**

It would be interesting to see how both the author and the composer would react were they to hear this, one of the best known carols of all, sung at a service, because neither words nor music were intended to be united. Indeed, if Charles Wesley had had his way, and elder brother, John had not altered it without asking, the opening lines would have remained,

**‘Hark, how all the welkin rings –  
Glory to the King of kings....’**

Moreover, Felix Mendelssohn declared that the melody now used for the carol was unsuitable for any hymn, because of its ‘martial’ and ‘buxom’ nature, whilst Charles Wesley insisted that “Hark, how all the welkin rings-“ was to be sung to a most ‘solemn’ tune. Fortunately, time seems to have overcome all objections, for otherwise we would have lost a favourite hymn.

The original carol first appeared, entitled ‘A Hymn for Christmas Day’, in “Hymns and Sacred Poems”, 1739 and consisted of ten stanzas of four lines each. The first time it appeared with the opening, “Hark! The herald angels sing” was in George Whitefield’s “Collection” of 1753, in which verses eight and ten were left out. Further modification occurred in the 1831 supplement to the “Collection” of 1780, for the second verse was also omitted. Even so, it is unlikely that the hymn would have endured into the Twentieth Century had it not been for William Hayman Cummings (1831 – 1915). Mr. Cummings was a renowned chorister at St. Paul’s Cathedral and Temple Church in London, a tenor who sang at the first London performance of “Elijah”, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn in 1847, shortly before the composed died, aged only thirty-eight.

Nine years later, William Cummings was organist at Waltham Abbey, where he adapted chorus 2 of Mendelssohn’s ‘Festgesang Opus 68’, which had been composed in 1840 to commemorate the tercentenary of the invention of printing. The tune was called “St. Vincent” when it first appeared in Richard Chope’s “Congregational Hymn and Tune Book” of 1857, but it was called “Mendelssohn” when it was published in the 1861 edition of “Hymns Ancient and Modern”, in which it was first linked with “Hark! The herald angels sing”.

The current version of three stanzas of eight lines with a two-line chorus was produced for “Wesley’s Hymns” in 1877, to be sung to “Mendelssohn”. This has remained unchanged, simply because words and tunes not only complement one another, but the cheeriness of the carol is singularly appropriate for the celebration of Christ’s birth. If you want to see Charles Wesley’s original text, it is printed in “The Companion to Hymns and Psalms” page 95.

There is a hideous irony that a man who wrote more than 6000 hymns, including “Hark! The herald angels sing”, who wrote the line ‘Peace on earth, and mercy mild’ should have led quite a tempestuous life. His father’s rectory was razed to the ground by a mob, he entered the ministry most unwillingly, then travelled to America with brother, John, where the brothers so infuriated settlers at Frederica that someone fired at John– the musket ball fortunately missing him! The Governor of the settlement advised them to return to England, adding that they should learn not to drive themselves – and others – so hard.

After the two Wesleys returned, convinced of their failure to serve God faithfully, both experienced a conversion during the Whitsun of 1738 and were thus moved to active social evangelism that became the Methodist Church in time. Despite this Charles considered himself an Anglican priest all his days. Indeed, Charles almost fell out with John when John ordained priests and commissioned local preachers – especially female ones. Mind you, Charles was not above acting contrary to the wishes of bishops: he was rebuked for re-baptising a woman who had originally been given the sacrament by a dissenting minister; he was also censured for preaching in the open air (‘most inappropriate’) but continued to do so until a landowner sued him for trespass and Charles was fined £20, a huge sum in those days.

Both John and Charles were renowned for visiting prisoners, especially for their support of those condemned to hang at Tyburn. Both often accompanied the poor souls to the very gallows, offering prayers of comfort. A less commendable trait of each was a willingness to interfere with the other’s romances; neither John nor Charles emerged with credit. Charles Wesley did not marry until he was forty-two and John objected on three grounds: the age of the bride-to-be; Charles’ peripatetic

lifestyle and his lack of wealth. Charles ignored John's arguments and married Sarah Gwynne, a daughter of a Breconshire squire and for several took her with him wherever he travelled – riding pillion on his horse. 'Faithful Sally', as called her, was twenty years younger than Charles and bore him eight children. Sadly, five died before they reached adulthood, but the union was a happy one, possibly, because after she first became pregnant, Charles decided to end his itinerant preaching for her sake.

Incredibly, Charles intervened when John seemed destined to marry a Grace Murray, a young Geordie widow. Charles contrived to marry her instead to a Local Preacher from Newcastle, though it is impossible to imagine why he acted in that way. As a result, John married Mrs. Molly Vazeille, a wealthy widow, in February 1751. It was not only the weather that was frosty, for their marriage was a disaster. They quarrelled violently and, on one occasion the angry wife tore a handful of hair from her husband's head. After a relatively short time, the couple separated and the only thing that she bequeathed John on her death was her wedding ring. It seems a long way from 'peace on earth and goodwill to all men'!

Charles' health and mental powers declined noticeably in 1778 and the last decade of his life was a trial for him and his family. He died in March, 1788, three years to the month before John, who remained vigorous to within a day or two of his death, preaching to the end. John Wesley's dying words are reputed to have been, "The best is God is with us." It is, indeed!

### **'In the bleak midwinter' by Christina Georgina Rossetti {1830 - 1894}**

The question, '**What can I give him, poor as I am ?**' and the answer, '**Give my heart**', encapsulate the message of this beautiful Christmas hymn, written by a strikingly beautiful Victorian lady. There are some wonderful carols as well as some over-sentimental, not to say theologically dubious ones, but Christina Rossetti produced two of the finest: 'In the bleak midwinter' and 'Love came down at Christmas', in which love features thirteen times in twelve short lines. Who was Christina Rossetti and what made her produce fine religious hymns?

Christina Georgina Rossetti was the youngest of three children of an Italian émigré, a clever man who had despaired of politics in his native land and who became Professor of Italian at Kings College, London before he married a vivacious, equally-clever lady. Christina's elder brothers were Dante Gabriel and William Michael, the former becoming a notable artist and poet, a leading member of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. As was customary in upper middle-class homes, Christina was educated by her mother, Frances, whose love of literature and spiritual convictions were passed on to the daughter. Christina developed into a strikingly lovely adolescent, so striking that an artist friend of her brother, Holman Hunt, used her as a model for the face of Christ in one of his paintings!

Naturally, someone as beautiful as Christina had many suitors and she was engaged to another artist, James Collinson for some time. There was an impediment to their marriage, however, as he was a Catholic and she a devout Anglican. Originally, Mr. Collinson declared that he would convert to the Church of England, but his conscience would not let him fulfil his promise and so the engagement was broken. The consequences of his decision effectively blighted Christina's life, for soon afterwards, she was courted by the urbane Mr. W.B. Scott, who not only won her heart, but gained the affection of the whole Rossetti family - until it came to light that he was already married and had a string of mistresses! Despite this discovery and although it precluded any physical relationship, Christina could not bring herself to finish completely with the roving Mr. Scott, so she befriended his long-suffering wife and contented herself with a platonic relationship. Nevertheless, her unhappy experiences with men left psychological scars, so when another man - a suitable, honourable one - proposed to her, she politely declined and turned her attention to writing poetry, some of which dwelt with unrequited love, others of which dealt with matters spiritual. Clearly, she preferred agape to eros.

Christina never married and was said by some to be a lonely figure as she reached middle age. She lived a good Christian life and brought joy to those around her, not just through her words, but by her deeds. She died shortly after Christmas 1894 when only sixty four, leaving a legacy of good verse and a number of fine hymns, including 'None other lamb, none other name' which, though frequently neglected, is worthy of note.

'In the bleak midwinter' is set in Victorian Britain, with its imagery of snow and yet the subsequent verses refer to cherubim, seraphim, the Virgin Mary, the shepherds and the Magi. Clearly, she demonstrated that Christmas is for all people, everywhere and NOW! The final stanza is a reminder that Christ does not desire our riches, does not ask for wisdom; all he asks of us is our love - for him, for the Father and for our neighbours everywhere. That final verse is almost a sermon in itself.

The carol is usually set to one of two melodies : Gustav Holst's 'Cranham', which was written for the 1906 "English Hymnal" in which 'In the bleak midwinter' first appeared as a hymn, even though it was written before 1872. This version has an extra verse, beautiful in its contrast between the glorious choir of angels and the simplicity of Mary's worship as she kissed the infant Lord.

**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.**

The other setting is by Harold Darke, a gorgeous version, but better suited to choirs than congregations. This form of the carol includes the stanza,

**Enough for him whom cherubim  
Worship night and day,  
A breastful of milk,  
And a mangerful of hay:  
Enough for him, whom angels  
Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel  
Which adore.**

It speaks volumes of some prudish editors that 'A breastful of milk' has sometimes been altered to 'A heartfelt of love', lest delicate sensibilities be offended, but there's nowt as queer as folk, I suppose!

### **"It came upon the midnight clear" by Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810 – 1876)**

Rather like, 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind', this carol by Edmund Sears was not intended as such, for it was a moral, or protest poem, linking the angels' song to the shepherds to a call for world peace. Edmund Hamilton Sears was born in Sandisfield, Massachusetts in 1810 and became a Unitarian minister, despite which he wrote a book about and even frequently preached on the divinity of Jesus Christ. Like many American citizens, Revd. Sears was concerned about the industrial development in New England which created social problems not dissimilar to those in the United Kingdom during its Industrial Revolution. Then there was the lawlessness of the Californian Gold Rush in 1849, widely and often inaccurately recorded in 'Western' films, but nevertheless generally violent.

'It came upon the midnight clear' was published as a poem in the 1849 book called 'The Christian Register', but we should bear in mind that it was at this time that agitation against slavery led to the build-up of tension between Northern and Southern states in the USA, though it did not explode into the terrible Civil War until 1861. Nonetheless, Edmund Sears might well have foreseen the likelihood of conflict when he penned his verse. The carol usually uses only four verses, the original fourth of five verses having been omitted, but in those verses is a gracious appeal for humankind to respond to the angels' song, calling for peace on earth – an appeal that ought to be for every day, not just Christmastide.

Edmund Sears suffered ill health in his thirties, so he spent much of his time writing, producing a number of books, including 'The Fourth Gospel', four years before he died at Weston, Massachusetts, aged only 66. 'It came upon the midnight clear' is usually sung to Sir Arthur Sullivan's 'Noel', based upon a Herefordshire folk tune, but in 2016 Howard Goodall composed a new melody for Aled Jones and I should not be surprised to hear it picked up by choirs, if not church congregations.

### **“It was on a starry night” by Joy Webb**

Joy Webb was a captain in the Salvation Army who, in 1963, formed the Joy Strings, a band with two guitarists, a drummer and vocalist/tambourine-player. The group’s aim was to develop Salvationist music by using pop music to promote the Christian message among younger people.

Despite criticism from Salvation Army traditionalists, the Joy Strings enjoyed chart successes with ‘It’s no secret’ and ‘Starry Night’. Joy Webb wrote ‘Starry Night’ in 1964 and it not only reached number 24 in the charts, but is still popular in children’s nativity productions. Joy was joined as the hymn-writer by the group’s guitarists, Peter Dalziel and Bill Davidson.

The Joy Strings performed to wide audiences, ranging from concerts at city churches to late night cabaret at the Blue Angel Club, appealing to a variety of age groups. Sadly criticism from within and outside the Salvation Army brought the group to end its public work in 1968, which is a shame for, after all, was it not William Booth who asked why the devil should have the best tunes?

### **‘Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness’ by Tim Hughes (born 1977)**

Revd Tim Hughes was born in 1978 the son of a Church of England vicar. He spent his early years in High Wycombe, before moving to Birmingham as a teenager when his father was appointed vicar of St John’s Church, Harborne. He studied History at Sheffield University and he began his music career in 1997, when he was invited by Mike Pilavachi to lead worship at a Soul Survivor festival. When Matt Redman left Soul Survivor at Watford Church, Tim succeeded him as Worship Pastor. Then, in 2005, he moved to Holy Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in central London, as director of worship.

Tim trained for ordination at St Mellitus College, in London and, in June 2013, he was ordained in the Church of England as a deacon at St Paul’s Cathedral. A year later he was ordained as a priest and, from 2013 to 2015, Hughes was a curate at Holy Trinity, Brompton. In 2015 Revd. Tim was appointed Vicar of St Luke’s church, Gas Street in Birmingham. St. Luke’s was a plant from Holy Trinity, Brompton and involved the renovation of an abandoned warehouse for use as a church. It officially opened in February, 2016. He wrote both words and music of ‘Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness’ for his first album, “Here I am to worship” in 2001, basing the hymn on Philippians chapter 2.

Although it is not exclusively an Advent hymn, it is very apt to open worship with this hymn.

### **‘Lo, he comes with clouds descending’ by Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)**

This hymn was one of many penned by Charles Wesley and was published in “Hymns of Intercession for all Mankind” in 1758, one of five under the heading, ‘Thy Kingdom Come’. Although “Singing the Faith” lists it under Advent, ‘Lo, he comes with clouds descending’ really refers to Christ’s second coming, for it has several references from Revelation. Having made that observation, Advent is a time when we think of both incarnation and Christ’s coming in glory.

The story of this hymn is complicated, as Charles Wesley may have been influenced by John Cennick’s “Lo, he cometh, countless trumpets” which was printed in 1752 and by a hymn written by Martin Madan at around the same time. Nevertheless, The Wesley hymn has deservedly stood the test of time, especially when set to marvellous melody, ‘Helmsley’ by Thomas Olivers, who wrote “The God of Abraham praise”

### **“Long ago, prophets knew” by Fred Pratt Green**

Fred Pratt Green was born in 1903 in Roby, a town near Liverpool, England, the third child of Charles Green, a leather merchant. He chose to be called Fred for his hymn-writing, though his close family, and in particular his late wife Marjorie, used Derick. Pratt was the name of a relative, who was a Methodist preacher. His father resigned from the office of Wesleyan Local Preacher because he could not accept current teaching about eternal damnation for unbelievers.

Young Fred Green attended Clarendon Road Wesleyan Church and Wallasey Grammar School, before moving on to Rydal, a Methodist boarding school at Colwyn Bay, North Wales. In his schooldays, he showed interest in becoming an architect, but began work in his father’s leather business. During the pastorate of Revd William Rushby at Clarendon Road, and after hearing a sermon on John Masefield’s The Everlasting Mercy, he applied for Wesleyan ministry about the time

his friend Eric Thomas offered for the Anglican priesthood. The key to Fred's eventual choice of Methodism was its open welcome to Holy Communion.

In 1924 he served in the Severn Valley Circuit, before spending three years at Didsbury Theological College, from which he emerged with opinions that the Church must become involved in social concerns and with a deep distrust of fundamentalism in any form. (These views are reflected in many of his hymns). He was Chaplain to Hunmanby Hall Girls' Boarding School in Filey, North Yorkshire and in 1931, he married Marjorie, who taught French at the school.

During the Second World War, he combined his ministerial duties with those of an air raid warden not far from the Thames docks during the Battle of Britain and subsequent Blitz. In 1944 he and Marjorie befriended an agnostic poetess, Fallon Webb, who encouraged Fred to write poetry, leading to the production of more than three hundred hymns, many of which were written after he had sat down as a minister. Many of his hymns are used regularly in worship and one of his hymns was included in the official order of service for the celebrations of the Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II.

In 1990, Fred and Marjorie Green moved to Cromwell House Methodist Home for the Aged, in Norwich, where Marjorie died in 1993. Fred was awarded an MBE in 1995 for services to hymn-writing. Fred Pratt Green died quietly in his sleep at Cromwell House on Sunday 22nd October 2000.

"Long ago, prophets knew" was written in 1970 as a response to a request from John Wilson for an Advent hymn set to the melody "Theodoric", from 'Piae Cantiones', a Sixteenth Century tune. It is one of the features of Revd. Fred that his hymns are set to well-known tunes, so congregations can concentrate on the words instead of worrying about an unfamiliar setting.

### **"Love came down at Christmas" by Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830 – 1894)**

Christina Rossetti was born in London, the daughter of an Italian refugee who became Professor of Italian at London University. Her brothers were leading members of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and Christina first poetical works were printed in the Pre-Raphaelite magazine, "The Germ" in 1850. Indeed, she was a fine Victorian poetess, producing anthologies such as "Goblin Market and other poems" (1862), "The Prince's Progress" (1866), "Sing-Song" (1872) and "A pageant and other poems" (1866). Alas, despite being strikingly beautiful, Christina was unlucky in love, her fiancé, James Collison, calling off their wedding because he was unable to renounce the Roman Catholic Church and she was a devout Anglican. Worse still, a second suitor proved to be already married and was discovered to be a womaniser, so she never married.

'Love came down at Christmas' was first published as a poem in "Time Flies: A Reading Diary" in 1883, but was not used as a carol until it was published in the "Oxford Hymn Book" of 1908. The most popular tune is "Hermitage" which was specifically written for this carol by Reginald Morris when it was used in the 1925 "Songs of Praise". It first appeared in Methodist circles when published in the 1933 "Methodist Hymn Book". Eric Routley composed "Love Incarnate", another popular setting, during the 1930s, though it was not combined with Christina's words until both appeared in "The BBC Hymn Book" in 1951.

I am not only attracted to the hymn by its message and setting, but because it uses the word 'love' or 'lovely' twelve times in its twelve lines and, after all, love – divine love – is at the heart of Christmas!

### **"O come, all ye faithful" by Frederick Oakeley (1802 to 1880) et al.**

I ought to have seen the warning signs when I noted that this hymn was not the work of one person, but I thought that such a well-known hymn would have a straightforward, if ancient, history. I presumed that, as it has a Latinised form, 'Adeste fidelis', it was at the latest a medieval hymn, but I was wrong. Verses 1, 2, 5 and 6 of "O come, all ye faithful" first appeared in Latin form in an Eighteenth Century Jacobite manuscript, 'A Prayer for James'. The James alluded to was probably James III, the 'Old Pretender' and the author is believed to have been John Francis Wade, a member of a colony of exiled Roman Catholic revolutionaries, living in Douai, France. Certainly, the manuscript is in Wade's own hand. This Catholic colony had fled Britain after the enforced abdication of King James II in 1688 and it retained its British character until the late Eighteenth Century, when it was either assimilated in French society, or simply disintegrated. The title was John Wade's secret rallying call to fellow Jacobites to rise up, hoping to put James III on the English throne! Jesuits are believed to have brought back the manuscript when they were allowed to return at the dawn of the Nineteenth Century.

John Wade specialised in writing beautiful manuscripts, including music, which were highly sought after by wealthy families, colleges and choir leaders. He was a gifted linguist, producing manuscripts in a number of languages and teaching both music and Latin. It is believed that the manuscript 'Adeste fidelis' was held by Jesuits until it appeared with the chorus, 'Venite adorate', at a college in Lisbon, Portugal. Shortly afterwards, the chorus was altered to 'Venite adoremus', in which form it was discovered by Rev. Frederick Oakeley.

Frederick Oakeley was born in Shrewsbury at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. He took his degree at Christ Church, Oxford, becoming a Fellow of Balliol College in 1827, after which he was ordained. He became Vicar of St. Margaret's Chapel, London, (now called All Saints, Margaret Street). In time he rose to become Prebendary of Lichfield Cathedral, but he had become an active part of the Oxford Movement and he followed John Newman into the Roman Catholic Church after 1845. He spent much of his time as a Catholic working among the poor of the districts around Islington, before he ended his days in 1880 as a canon of Westminster Cathedral. It is worth noting that, at a time when the Church of England seemed to have lost impetus, the Methodists and Salvationists at one extreme and the Anglo-Catholics at the other saw outreach to the poor and marginalized as an essential part of their faith.

"O come, all ye faithful", or "Ye faithful, approach ye" as it was originally, was translated for the congregation at St. Margaret's Chapel and first appeared in "The Hymnal for Use in the English Church" in 1852. That line and the opening line of the second stanza, (originally 'God of God, Light of Light') were changed by Cooke and Denton for the 1853 "Church Hymnal". The present third stanza was written by Abbe Etienne Jean Francois, the Monsignor de Borderies at the start of the Nineteenth Century, after he had been exiled to England because of the French Revolution. The fourth stanza was written by someone unknown to celebrate the Feast of Epiphany. These two verses became part of the hymn we now sing in "The Altar Hymnal" of 1884.

The melody, "Adeste Fideles", is believed to have been written by John Francis Wade himself to accompany the Latin text. It appeared in duple form in a 1760 manuscript that is preserved at St. Edmund's College, Ware. It was first connected to the English version in 1844, but was adapted by W.H. Monk for the 1875 "Hymns Ancient and Modern". Methodists, I know, use the harmonisation from the 1906 "English Hymnal", which is very similar to Monk's version. Incidentally, "Adeste Fidelis" was used in Sankey's "Sacred Songs and Solos" for the setting of "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord". It scans, but lacks something – possibly it is too closely associated with this carol.

Despite its complex origins and some of its language which may defeat young children, "O Come, all ye faithful" is an eminently singable hymn and I like nothing more than to see the organist pull out all the stops as we sing the final verse on Christmas day!

**"O come, O come, Immanuel" trans. from C18th Latin by John Mason Neale {1818 – 1866}**  
In monastic orders from the Ninth Century, during the days before Christmas, it became customary for the antiphon, or verse of a Psalm, which preceded the Magnificat at Evening Prayers to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, by using various titles linked to Jesus: **Wisdom; Lord of Hosts; Root of Jesse; Key of David; Dayspring from on high; King of the nations, Immanuel and two days before Christmas, Virgin of virgins.** The antiphons were sung to plainsong chants and great stress was laid on the Os, with much rising and falling of notes before the title was sung. As a result, these particular antiphons became known as 'The Great Os of Advent'. I must mention that particular antiphons were associated with specific members of the Monastery: for example, the Abbot would sing, 'O Wisdom', while the Prior sang, 'O Lord of Hosts' and the Cellarer, 'O Key of David'. There was a price to be paid for the privilege, however, for the leader of the antiphon was expected to provide food and drink for the monastery on the day he sang!

You might have expected that 'The Great Os' would have disappeared soon after the dissolution of the monasteries, but there is evidence that Advent anthems continued long afterwards and, indeed, some are still used in cathedrals today. One piece of evidence is in the 1662 Prayer Book Calendar which highlights 16<sup>th</sup> December as 'O Wisdom'. How, then, did one Advent anthem become a classical Advent hymn, used by most denominations in Advent services? Our answer takes us first to Germany where, in 1710, an anonymous compiler in Cologne set the Great Os, still in Latin, to a

Kyrie melody from an old French missal. During 1851 this was discovered in that form by Revd. John Mason Neale, a gifted linguist with a remarkable poetic ability. It was a fortunate that Revd. Neale found the work, for he quickly saw its potential and took great pains to translate the original words in the striking way that has helped this hymn remain a favourite.

Who was John Mason Neale and what led an Anglican priest to devote so much of his short life to translating Greek and Latin texts into much-loved hymns? John Neale was born in London on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1818. His father was Revd. Cornelius Neale, who had been an extremely successful student at Cambridge University, and his mother was the daughter of John Mason Good, an accomplished academic in his own right. Both Revd. and Mrs. Neale were described as ‘pronounced evangelists’ and it was natural that they would have wanted their son to follow in his father’s footsteps. After his time at Sherborne Grammar School in Dorset, John Mason Neale was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, but his inability to master Mathematics resulted in his receiving only an Ordinary Degree. Nevertheless, his non-mathematical gifts, including fluency in twelve languages and a working knowledge of eight more, meant that he was admitted as a Fellow of Downing College and he took Holy Orders in 1841. Shortly after his marriage to Sarah Webster, in 1843, he was given the living of Crawley. Alas, his induction to the parish at Crawley was short-lived, for he had been plagued with respiratory trouble for much of his life and, after only six weeks, the strain of his duties caused his health to break down, so much so that he was despatched to Madeira on medical advice. In fact, his doctors told him that unless he wintered in warm climes, he would surely die.

For the next three years, he spent much of the winters in the library of a seminary in Madeira, where he studied the architecture and liturgy of the Orthodox churches, while, in the summer months, he travelled much of Britain and Western Europe, studying so deeply that he established himself as a leading ecclesiologist. He even wrote a scholarly book about the Eastern Church, although he never had the opportunity to actually visit Eastern Europe. Then, in 1846, he was invited to become Warden of Sackville College, a home for twenty elderly people, near East Grinstead in Sussex. When he was offered the position, the college was in a very neglected state and, though his salary was a very meagre £28 per annum, John Mason Neale began work in earnest to restore the buildings and make the lives of those in his care more comfortable. Indeed, during the twenty years he was Warden, he rebuilt the college chapel, founded an orphanage, but he is remembered best of all for establishing St. Margaret’s Convent in East Grinstead, originally to train a dedicated band of women to nurse sick people in the isolated rural communities surrounding the convent. In fact the work of St. Margaret’s Sisterhood developed in many ways and has spread around the world.

Now you might have thought that such commitments would have meant that Revd. Neale had no time for other activities, but he drove himself hard – possibly too hard for his own good – because he wrote extensively. His works included collections of sermons, children’s stories, histories and hymns! It is for his hymns that he will be best remembered, because, although many of them were his translations of Latin or Greek texts, his gift of poetry ensured that the English versions encapsulated the very essence of the original authors – and probably enhanced them, too! It is worthy of note that, while he published “Medieval Hymns” in 1851, “Hymnal Noted” in 1852 and 1854 and “Hymns of the Eastern Church” in 1862, so many of his ‘translated’ hymns were incorporated into the 1861 edition of “Hymns Ancient and Modern” that he was responsible for one-eighth of that publication: seventy-one out of six hundred and fifty-six hymns.

Like a number of contemporary ‘Oxbridge’ priests, John Mason Neale was very High Church and, while this meant that he was always conscious of the Christian Year, so that many of his best-known hymns were written to celebrate its festivals, he fell out with the Bishop of Chichester when, amongst other ‘popish ways’, he set a crucifix and candlesticks on the altar of the college chapel. Consequently, he was forbidden to officiate in the Diocese of Chichester for fourteen years, though, fortunately, Sackville College was outside the Bishop’s jurisdiction.

No doubt weakened by his breathing complaint as well as by both his incredible hard work and the wrangling over his liturgical practices, John Mason Neale died on 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1866, leaving five children, one of whom, Ermenild, became the Mother of St. Margaret’s Convent. But he did not just leave five daughters: he left a legacy of hymns, many of which are sung today. Not only do we have



“O come, O come, Immanuel”, but also “Jerusalem the Golden”, “Good King Wenceslas”, All glory, laud, and honour”, “The Royal Banners forward go”, “The Day of Resurrection”, “Come ye faithful, raise the strain”, “O happy band of pilgrims” and “Safe home. Safe home in port”, which was sung at his funeral.

### **“O little town of Bethlehem” by Phillips Brooks (1835 – 1893)**

For years I laboured under the misconception that ‘O little town of Bethlehem’ was a Victorian English carol, because it has been a staple part of carol services, sung to the lovely ‘Forest Green’. In fact, I thought it rather a cheek that it is usually sung in American films to ‘St. Louis’, a melody by Lewis H. Redner. Well, it just goes to show how wrong I can be, for both author and composer were Americans and ‘Forest Green’ by Ralph Vaughan Williams was first used thirty years afterwards. I think I had better put away the hair shirt and tell you this carol’s story.

The author of the carol, Revd. Phillips Brooks, was a huge man, six feet six in his socks and broadly- built, too. He spent his life in Massachusetts, having been born in Boston during 1835. He was a gifted linguist, graduating from Harvard University, but although he set out to teach Latin, he found that his gift was not in teaching, although he loved children and they enjoyed his company. Instead, he swiftly turned towards the ministry and studied at Virginia Theological Seminary. He became famous for his direct, compelling preaching, although he spoke extremely quickly, over two hundred words per minute, which would certainly have tested the concentration of his congregations! He could also sing more than two hundred hymns from memory, which is a considerable feat.

Phillips Brooks admired President Lincoln and was a fervent supporter of the anti-slavery movement, even when it led to the carnage of the US Civil War. So moved was he by Abraham Lincoln that he made a long speech in his honour after the President was assassinated. Shortly afterwards, in the summer of 1865, Revd. Brooks travelled widely. He arrived in the Holy Land in December and visited the Old Church at Bethlehem on 24<sup>th</sup> December, 1865. The town was not as commercialised then as it is now, so the tranquillity and beauty of the place impinged itself in his mind, yet nothing came of his experience for two more years.

As Christmas approached in 1867, he began to plan a service for the Sunday School of Holy Trinity Church, Philadelphia, where he was vicar. As often seems to happen, in my case at least, he felt the need for a fitting carol, could not find one and went to bed frustrated. As he lay meditating, he thought about that Christmas Eve in Bethlehem and the words we sing now came to him. He rose and composed his carol the same night, then approached his Sunday School Superintendent, Lewis H. Redner, asking him to find a suitable tune for the carol to be sung to. Although Lewis Redner was musical, he failed to arrive at a suitable melody, until in the middle of the night on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, he woke with a melody in mind, so he wrote it down before retiring to his bed once more. I hope that he was a bachelor, like Phillips Brooks; otherwise his spouse would not have been amused!

On Christmas Eve, Mr. Redner not only finished the harmonies for the tune, ‘St, Louis’, but rehearsed the Sunday School, so that ‘O little town of Bethlehem’ was sung with great success on Christmas Day. Revd. Phillips Brooks remained at Holy Trinity, although the church had grown much bigger during his incumbency and he had turned down a number of bishoprics. His preferment had been opposed by some Bostonians, partly because his father had been a merchant and he was deemed Low Church, partly because Phillips Brooks preached at churches belonging to other denominations and partly because his uncle, the richest man in Boston had been an Unitarian. In 1891, he succumbed at last and was appointed Bishop of Massachusetts, though he did not last long in post, for he contracted what is usually a non-life-threatening illness and died, aged fifty-seven. Bostonians were shocked by Bishop Brooks’ unexpected demise, so a number of stained-glass windows and educational foundations were established in his memory.

‘O little town of Bethlehem’ was first published in the United Kingdom during 1896 in “A Treasury of Hymns”, then in “The Church Hymnary” two years later, after which it has been included in most hymn books and deservedly so. I presume it must have been sung to ‘St. Louis’ until 1906, because The ‘English’ setting, “Forest Green”, was not adapted by Ralph Vaughan Williams from a folk song called “The Ploughboy’s Dream” until 1903 and was first married to Phillips Brooks’ words in

the 1906 'English Hymnal'. Incidentally, Forest Green is near Ockley in Surrey, where Vaughan Williams discovered the tune.

**“Of the Father’s love begotten” by Prudentius {348 – 410} – trans. by John Mason Neale & Henry Williams Baker**

This lovely hymn was written in Latin by Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, who was born in Northern Spain in the middle of the Fourth Century. Little is known of his life, except that he was a successful lawyer, but he retired at fifty-seven to devote his last years to the Church. The original poem on which the hymn is based, “Da puer plectrum”, was published in the ‘Cathemerinon’ and was used in its original form as a Christmas-tide hymn at York Minster and Hereford Cathedral from the Eleventh or Twelfth Centuries. It would probably have faded into obscurity had it not been for the diligence and skill of Revd. John Mason Neale, who contributed one eighth of the hymns published in the first edition of “Hymns Ancient and Modern” in 1861, but his translation was altered by the Rector of Monkland, Herefordshire, Revd. Henry Williams Baker, who was the Chairman of the committee that compiled that august hymnal.

John Mason Neale was born in London on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1818 and graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge with only an Ordinary Degree, owing to his failure to pass the mathematical requirements for an honours degree. Nevertheless, he took Holy Orders and was appointed vicar of Crawley in Sussex, but had to stand down after six weeks when life-long respiratory trouble made it impossible for him to carry out his duties. Indeed, doctors told him he would need to seek a warm, dry climate if he wished to survive, so he spent the following three years in Madeira, during which time he travelled widely and studied deeply until he became a leading light in the Ecclesiological Society – which studies church architecture, liturgy and decoration. When he was only twenty-eight, Revd. Neale became warden at Sackville College, an alms house for males, at East Grinstead, Sussex. It was not a well-paid appointment, but it allowed him to read and write and provided a challenge to which he rose. Not only did he build up Sackville College from a decrepit state, he founded the St. Margaret’s Sisterhood, an Anglican women’s community, originally to train nurses to care for the sick in their own homes, but their mission grew to spread around the world and a well-known girls’ school was run at East Grinstead until the late 1970s when the original convent was replaced by modern premises.

Unfortunately, Revd. Neale fell out with the Bishop of Chichester, who accused him of ‘popish practices’. Whilst it is true that John Mason Neale was a high churchman, an enthusiastic member of the ‘Oxford Movement’, he was always loyal to the Church of England, so he must have been hurt when the Bishop forbade him to preach in his diocese – though Sackville College lay beyond its boundaries! He was a prolific writer and skilful translator of hymns, so when he died at only forty-eight, in August 1866, he left us with many enduring hymns, including “O come, O come, Immanuel”, “Good King Wenceslas”, “All glory, laud and honour”, “The day of resurrection”, “Jerusalem the Golden”, “Come, ye faithful, raise the strain”, “To the name of our salvation”, “A great and mighty wonder” and, by no means least, “Of the Father’s love begotten”.

The co-writer of “Of the Father’s love begotten”, Sir Henry Williams Baker was born in Lambeth on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1821, was also a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, was ordained in 1844 and, in 1851, became vicar of Monkland in Herefordshire, where he remained until his death in 1877. He came from illustrious stock, for his father was a Vice Admiral and Henry succeeded to the Baronetcy in 1859. He was an enthusiastic hymnologist and was one of the original committee members who compiled “Hymns Ancient and Modern” in 1861. Some of his hymns, too have survived, including “The King of love my Shepherd is”, “Praise, O praise our God and King!” and “Lord, thy word abideth”. At times, his words may seem pompous, but he was a scholar who would have certainly excelled in Latin and Greek, so terms like ‘verdant pastures’ and ‘unctuous grace’ would have flowed naturally from him.

“Of the Father’s love begotten” is set to the melody “Divinum Mysterium”, plainsong possibly going back to Byzantine times, though we sing it to Thomas Helmore’s transcription from 1854. The

hymn tells us of Jesus as the proof of God's boundless love, that he is Alpha and Omega, the one foretold by prophets to whom be honour, praise and glory for evermore!

### **“Once in Royal David's city” by Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)**

The redoubtable and prolific hymn-writer, Mrs. Alexander, was the wife of William Alexander, Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, then, after her death, Bishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland. Two years before her marriage in 1850, 'Fanny' Alexander (she was Christened Cecil Frances after a family sponsor – a quaint Irish custom) published 'Hymns for Little Children', after complaints from children in her Sunday School class that learning the Catechism was difficult and 'boring'. Fourteen of the hymns in her book deal specifically with the Apostles' Creed, including 'All things bright and beautiful'. Other hymns include 'There is a green hill far away' and 'Once in royal David's city'.

Fanny was serious-minded from early childhood. She swiftly learned to read and write, producing poetry of her own when she was nine. She received an excellent education at home and was encouraged to write by Sir Walter Scott whom she met while staying with her mother's relatives in Scotland. Her uncle, who lived in Hampshire, introduced her to Revds. John Keble and Edward Pusey, members of the Oxford Movement, who influenced her religious belief. In fact, it was John Keble who wrote the preface for 'Hymns for Little Children' which became such a best-seller that it was reprinted over a hundred times. Money raised from this book's sales enabled Fanny to help run a home for deaf and dumb children in Strabane. Fanny's good works earned her many admirers, as much as her writing did, so when she died in Derry in 1895, thousands lined the streets as her funeral cortege passed by.

'Once in royal David's city' is usually sung to open the 'Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols' at Kings College, the opening verse by a boy soprano – an awe-inspiring sound. It was set to Henry Gauntlett's 'Irby', composed specifically for it in 1849. The marriage of the two was effectively cemented when they were included in the first edition of "Hymns Ancient and Modern" in 1861.

### **“See, amid the winter's snow” by Edward Caswall (1814 – 1878)**

Edward Caswall was born at Yateley, Hampshire in July 1814. He was the son of a clergyman and nephew of the Bishop of Salisbury, so it was almost inevitable that, following education at Marlborough College and Oxford University, he took Holy Orders in 1840. However, he was already part of the Oxford Movement and he followed Dr. John Newman into the Roman Catholic Church in 1847, much to his family's disapproval. It must have been a shock to Edward's wife, too, but they remained together until she died in 1850, after which Edward left his home in Wiltshire to join John Newman at the Oratory, Edgbaston in Birmingham. There Edward worked with a dozen Catholic priests, serving churches, schools and communities in some of the poorest parts of Ladywood and Hockley.

The work of these priests among the slum-dwellers won them both respect and love – and not only from fellow-Catholics, for they visited the sick, took relief to the poor, visited prisoners at Winson Green Gaol and campaigned for better living conditions. Although his work gave him little free time, Edward translated a number of old Latin hymns, four hundred, in fact, as a result of which we still sing, 'Jesus, the very thought of thee' and 'My God, I love thee' – though not very often, I confess.

'See, amid the winter's snow' was published in 1871, but had been published in "The Masque of Mary and other poems" in 1858. It is a fine carol, dealing not only with Luke's account of the nativity, but connecting Christ's incarnation to scriptural prophecies and adding the lovely chorus with its 'hail'. Although it appears in many non-conformist hymnals, perhaps because of Edward's 'popping', it does not appear in 'Hymns Ancient and Modern', 'The English Hymnal', nor 'Songs of Praise', but that is their loss.

Revd. Edward Caswall passed into new life on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1878 and is buried close to his mentor and friend, John Newman near Bromsgrove. 'See amid the winter's snow' was set to 'Humility / Oxford' by John Goss in 1871 and fits it perfectly.

### “The Calypso Carol” – Michael Perry (1942 – 1996)

“See him lying on a bed of straw,” echoes across the auditorium at many children’s services in schools and churches, as it has established itself as a favourite carol since it was written over fifty years ago. “The Calypso Carol” was written by Michael Perry for an end-of-term concert at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, in 1964 and was first published in 1969. Michael Perry was born in Beckenham, Kent in 1942 and was educated at Dulwich College before studying at University College London; Oak Hill Theological College, London; Ridley Hall, Cambridge; and the University of Southampton.

After his ordination in the Church of England, Michael Perry served at St Helens, before moving to Bitterne, Southampton, where he was curate and then vicar. During his time at Bitterne he was on the committees that produced the popular hymn books *Psalm Praise* (1973) and *Hymns for Today’s Church* (1982). From 1981 to 1989 Michael Perry served as Rector of Eversley, Hampshire. In 1982 he became Secretary of Jubilate Hymns, and was involved in editing most of their books. In addition, he worked as Chaplain and lecturer at the National Police Staff College, Bramshill. His last posting was as Vicar of Tonbridge in his native Kent from 1989 until 1996. He was appointed Chairman of the Church Pastoral Aid Society in 1993. He died in December, 1996.

### “Silent Night, holy night” / “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht” by Joseph Mohr (1792 to 1848)

One of the nightmare situations for a local preacher like me is to arrive for a service to find that there is neither an organist, nor any other musician. I have been saved twice at one church by a fine baritone, who acted as cantor. At another church where there was no organist for the evening service, I announced that, unless there was anyone confident enough to lead, I would try, adding mischievously, (but sadly truly), that my daughter said that I wander off key and invariably begin to sing flat. Miraculously, three delightful, musical ladies from the congregation volunteered and, as they are choristers, the singing that night was excellent! There is a secret in handling news that there is no organist: choose hymns that are simple to sing and which are well-known, even if they are not your original choice. If all else fails, you can read them in unison as poems: even I can manage that!

Imagine that it is Christmas Eve when your organist announces that some distinctly unholy mice have gnawed holes in the leather bellows of the church organ. It is long before the age of electronic keyboards and all you have is a guitar. It dawns on you that you will have to conduct worship with that instrument when your congregation will be expecting the usual fare of carols. What do you do? If you were Father Joseph Mohr, you would persuade the organist to set to music a carol that you had written recently. Unlikely as it sounds, this is the origin of one of the best-loved Christmas Carols, ‘Stille Nacht, Heilige Nact’, or, depending upon the translation, ‘Silent Night, Holy Night,’ or ‘Still the Night’.

Joseph Mohr was born in Salzburg in 1792. He progressed to the ministry from the choir of Salzburg Cathedral, being ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. It was when he was assistant priest at the Church of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, on Christmas Eve, 1818 that the organist, Franz Gruber, bore him the dire news that mice had punctured the leather organ bellows and not even an asthmatic wheeze could be drawn from the instrument. Father Joseph was nonplussed for a moment only; then he pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket, on which he had written a poem that he had hoped to turn into a children’s carol. With admirable faith, he handed it to Herr Gruber, his friend, and invited him to set it to music which could be accompanied upon the guitar and sung by children.

Franz Gruber was five years older than Father Joseph. He was a gifted, natural musician, but he must have been surprised how quickly the melody for ‘Stille Nacht’ came to him. Upon Christmas Day the two men and twelve children gave the maiden performance of the carol and, like most innovations, it received a mixed reception. However, when the organ repairer saw the composition, he begged a copy and circulated it round his village of Fugen in Zillertal. Soon it had become extremely popular and its fame increased when the Austrian concert singers, the Strasser Sisters, sang it round Europe. It was translated into several languages, the first English translation being by Emily Eliot of Brighton in 1858 and another was by Jane Campbell in 1863. It may be worth noting that the translation used in both “The Methodist Hymn Book” and “Hymns and Psalms” is by Stopford Augustus Brooke in “Christian Hymns” of 1881. “The United Methodist Hymnal” of the U.S.A. uses the “Silent Night, Holy Night” translation of John F. Young.

One of the most moving stories of this hymn is from Christmas 1914. British troops in their trenches were astounded to hear their German enemies singing “Stille Nacht” and other carols. True to the courtesies of the age, the British replied with English carols; then greetings were shouted and, on Christmas Day soldiers actually left their trenches and fraternised with men who had been trying to kill them hours before. Had matters been left to their natural conclusion, the Great War might have ended that first Christmas, but the senior officers decided that this was not the done thing and the truce was ended forcibly. Had hearts ruled heads, millions of lives might have been spared.

Although Joseph Mohr seems to have led an unspectacular career, dying at only fifty six whilst an assistant priest at Wagrein near St. Johann, more is known about the organist, Franz Gruber. He was the third son of weavers from Unterweisburg on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1787. He displayed a gift for music from an early age, but his parents objected to his studying the organ and he was apprenticed as a weaver for a short time. The village schoolmaster, who was also the organist, argued passionately for Franz to be allowed to study the organ at night and he prevailed. It was as well, for the organist was taken ill and twelve year old Franz deputised for him.

As a result, Franz became schoolmaster at Arnsdorf, before becoming organist at St. Nicholas’ in Obernsdorf, where he remained until 1829. In that year Franz Gruber was appointed Headmaster at Berndorf. In 1833, he became organist and choirmaster at Hallein, remaining thus until his death in 1863. He founded the Hallein Choral Society, for which he is still remembered, as well as for the sweet melody to which “Stille Nacht” is set. It is worth considering that it only took a couple of hours to compose a tune that has gone round the world and shows no sign of going out of fashion nearly two hundred years later. Now that is success!

### **“Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord” by Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)**

I am sometimes astounded how quickly hymns have been written and how often writers have recorded that it almost seems as they have merely copied down what has been dictated to them. Fanny Crosby, George Matheson and Charlotte Elliott are examples of such a phenomenon. The author of “Tell out, my soul”, Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith, is another. Bishop Timothy was born on Boxing Day 1926 in Manchester. His father was a schoolteacher and young Timothy was actually taught by his father, which is something I should have baulked at with my own children. Nevertheless, it worked well and Mr. Dudley-Smith senior inculcated a love of poetry in his son. Sadly, Timothy lost his father when he was only eleven. He attended Tonbridge School and Pembroke College, Cambridge, before going on to train for the ministry at Ridley Hall, Cambridge. In 1950, Timothy Dudley-Smith was ordained Deacon and was made Priest a year later.

Rev. Dudley-Smith served as a curate in Kent, writing poems that were published in “The British Weekly” magazine, then he moved to run a mission boys’ club in Bermondsey. In 1955, the evangelist Billy Graham ran a successful crusade in Great Britain and Timothy Dudley-Smith was asked to edit the follow-up magazine, “Crusade”, which aimed to secure those who had been moved to Christ by Billy Graham’s preaching. From there he spent thirteen years working for the Church Pastoral Aid Society, after which he was appointed Archdeacon of Norwich in 1973. In 1981 Rev. Dudley-Smith became Suffragan Bishop of Thetford, remaining in post until he retired in 1992. He was not prepared to rust away, however, for he has taken confirmation services, has fulfilled preaching appointments, has been a school governor – which I know from experience is a demanding voluntary role – and is a member of the Howard League for Penal Reform. On reflection, I don’t think that ‘retirement’ is an appropriate term for Bishop Timothy!

During his service with the Church Pastoral Aid Society, Timothy Dudley-Smith struck up a working relationship with a clergyman called Michael Baughen who wanted to work upon a new Christian song book. In 1961, Rev. Timothy read a review copy of the New Testament of the New English Bible. He was moved by the first line of the Magnificat, Luke 1: 46 – 55, so he used it as the opening of his poem. In his own words, he ‘speedily wrote the rest’. The editors of “The Anglican Hymnbook” of 1965 saw the potential of the poem as a hymn and made the inspired choice of setting it to ‘Woodlands’ which had been written by Walter Greatorex in 1919 for the hymn “Lift up your hearts”, while the composer was music master at Gresham School. It is a pity that Mr. Greatorex never heard Bishop Timothy’s words sung to his composition, because he died in 1949.

“Tell out, my soul” is wonderful in its power of adoration of God. It also carries the promise that God will overcome human pride and self-centredness, that his mercy will establish justice for the poor and hungry, but it is the last stanza that gives me greatest pleasure and challenge:

**‘Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!**

**Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.**

**Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord**

**To children’s children and for evermore!’**

Are we, as individuals, living out our faith and **gently leading** young people to Jesus?

Bishop Timothy still writes poems and hymns. He published three collections of his hymns, including “Lift Every Heart” in 1984. “Tell out, my soul, the glory of the Lord” and “Lord for the years” are probably his most successful hymns. Indeed, the former hymn was used for the enthronement of an Archbishop of York as well as at the consecration of Liverpool Cathedral in 1978. Moreover, no lesser a poet than John Betjeman commended “Tell out, my soul” as the worthiest of modern hymns, which is praise indeed.

I have never found a congregation to sing it feebly. It is one of those hymns, like ‘And can it be’, or ‘Thine be the glory’, that you need to use with care, unless you want hoarse voices at the end of a service. Worshippers who attend my services will notice that I **never** use it immediately before the sermon, just in case I have no voice to preach!

### **‘The angel Gabriel from heaven came,’ by Sabine Baring-Gould (1834 – 1924)**

Sabine Baring-Gould, as his names may suggest, came from an illustrious family. His father was a former cavalry officer and a Squire in Devon, whilst his mother was a daughter of Admiral Baring, which is where the double-barrelled surname comes from. Sabine was derived from Sir Edward Sabine, a relative who had been a noted soldier and explorer. Born in Exeter in January 1834, Sabine Baring-Gould only had three years’ formal education, because his parents toured Europe extensively, taking their children with them. As a result, Sabine spent two years at Kings College School, London, between 1844 and 1846, followed by a year at Warwick Grammar School. Nevertheless, in 1853 he was accepted at Clare College, from which he graduated in 1857, a considerable feat for someone with so little formal education.

The devout, shy graduate spent some time teaching, including a spell in a slum area in London, after which he was ordained on Whit Sunday, 1864 at Rippon, Yorkshire. Sabine was fortunate that, at his first curacy in Horbury, near Wakefield in Yorkshire, the incumbent, Rev. John Sharp shared his outlook. Horbury was a coal-mining and cheap cloth-making district, the inhabitants of which were largely poor and uneducated. Rev. Sharp directed Sabine to open a mission at Horbury Bridge, or Brig, as it had been corrupted to locally. He rented a cottage, turned the upstairs into a chapel and the lower floor into a night school, in addition to which he ran a Sunday School for the local youngsters. Despite reservations, because he was at first deemed to be ‘a toff’, Sabine Baring – Gould’s commitment soon won most of the locals’ trust, if not their love, so within a short space the cottage was full of learners and worshippers.

It was during this time that the River Calder burst its banks and romance entered the curate’s life, for he carried a sixteen year old girl to safety from the waters and was deeply smitten by her.

The girl, Grace Taylor, came from a large family that lived in such poverty that not everyone could go to church together, because they did not have sufficient ‘respectable clothing’ to go round. Grace worked at a ‘shoddy’ mill, where the cheapest and roughest cloth was made and lacked the social graces expected of a vicar’s wife. Indeed, when they were seen together at first, tongues in the village wagged scurrilously. Sabine was nothing if not openly honest, so he arranged at his own expense for Grace to attend a finishing school near to York Minster. While she was there, he paid her family the equivalent of her income, so that they could survive, such was their poverty. When she returned, as a ‘proper’ lady, in 1868, she and Sabine were married; I have no idea what his parents thought about his choice of wife!

When his father died in 1872, and Sabine became Squire of Lew Trenchard, he remained at his living in Essex until he was able to be appointed to be both vicar and Squire of Lew Trenchard in 1881. He moved into the manor house, which was just as well, for he and Grace had produced fifteen children together. Somehow he managed not only to attend to his family, but to perform his parish duties conscientiously, to produce one hundred and nineteen non-fiction and forty fiction books, and to

write several hymns, including “Now the day is over”, which was sung at his funeral. In addition, he collected old Devonian folk songs, including ‘Old Uncle Tom Cobley’ – I marvel at his energy. ‘The angel Gabriel from heaven came’ was written in 1922 and published in the “University Carol Book”, set to a Basque traditional carol melody. Grace Baring-Gould died in 1916, eight years before Sabine and such was his sense of loss that her tombstone is inscribed, ‘Half my soul’. Not a bad epitaph after forty-eight years of marriage!

### **“Unto us a boy is born” by Percy Dearmer {1867 – 1936}**

This carol was written in a Fifteenth Century Trier manuscript, but may have been written even earlier. It also appears in its original Latin in “Piae Cantiones” of 1582 and it was translated by Percy Dearmer for “The Oxford Book of Carols”, 1928. Several other translations have been made, but Revd. Dearmer’s is by far the best.

Percy Dearmer was born in London on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 1867, studied at Christ Church, Oxford, was ordained into the Church of England and became vicar of St. Mary’s Primrose Hill, until the Great War, when he served as a Red Cross chaplain and YMCA worker. He became Professor of Ecclesiastical Art at King’s College, London and became a Canon of Westminster Abbey in 1931, five years before he died.

Revd. Dearmer jointly edited the 1906 “English Hymnal”, “Songs of Praise” in 1925 and “The Oxford Book of Carols”, already mentioned, so he made quite a contribution to English hymnody!

### **“While shepherds watched their flocks by night” by Nahum Tate (1652 – 1715)**

This carol is a simple but exquisite retelling of Luke’s nativity story and, whilst it almost certainly doesn’t rate as Nahum Tate’s finest work, it has stood the test of time, for ‘While shepherds watched’ first appeared in a supplement to Mr. Tate’s Psalm book in 1700 and has remained a popular carol ever since. It has often been parodied by so-called humourists and I’m sure we’ve all heard verses such as ‘While shepherds washed their socks by night’, if not other versions! I say it was not likely to have been his finest work, because Nahum Tate was Poet Laureate from 1690, some might say more the result of his influence at Court than of his talent.

Nahum was the son of an Irish priest, Revd, Faithful Brady, and after graduating from Trinity College, Dublin, came to England, where he published a book of verse in 1677. Nahum Tate befriended the playwright and poet, John Dryden and completed the second part of Dryden’s controversial poem ‘Absalom and Ahithophel’ when John Dryden had to work on a new play. After rewriting ‘King Lear’ with a happy ending – the mind boggles – Nahum wrote some plays of his own, produced a poem praising tea and wrote the libretto for Purcell’s ‘Dido and Aeneas’.

Some of Nahum Tate’s work were of a spiritual nature, for he collaborated with a fellow Irishman, the Revd. Nicholas Brady to produce ‘A new version of the psalms of David’, dedicated to King William III in 1696 and the enduring hymn, ‘Through all the changing scenes of life’. Nicholas Brady was Chaplain to King William at that time and he lived a successful, profitable life, outliving Nahum by eleven years. Unfortunately, Nahum became addicted to drink and fell into such serious debt that he had to spend his last days in a debtors’ refuge. Indeed, he died in June, 1715, hiding in the Royal Mint in Southwark where debtors were protected from arrest.

Although ‘While shepherds watched their flocks by night’ is usually sung to “Westminster Old”, it is sometimes sung to ‘Lyngham’, though I like it sung to ‘On Ilkley Moor baht’ at’. I have been told that it can be sung to the chorus of ‘Sweet chiming Christmas bells’! I have sung ‘Sweet chiming Christmas bells’ to its original words, so I feel I must try that melody to ‘While shepherds watched’ sometime.

### **‘Who would think that what was needed’ by John Bell b. 1949) & Graham Maule (b.1958)**

This hymn was published in ‘Heaven Shall Not Wait’ in 1987 by John Bell and Graham Maule, of the Iona Community. They have written many hymns, often using Scots ballad melodies, but this one uses a popular tune, ‘Scarlet Ribbons’, which was composed in about fifteen minutes by Evelyn Danzig in 1949 at her home in Port Washington, New York. The original words for ‘Scarlet Ribbons’ were penned by Jack Segal. John Lambertson Bell was born in Kilmarnock and studied at the University of Glasgow in 1974. He was elected Rector at the University in 1977, while he was still a student, as was Gordon Brown.

After working in the Netherlands and doing spells of church youth work, John Bell became employed full-time in the areas of music and worship with the Wild Goose Resource Group. He is a former convener of the Church of Scotland's Panel on Worship and also convened the committee to revise the Church Hymnary. In 1987, he also wrote the hymn "The Summons" – 'Will you come and follow me' which is set to 'Kelvingrove'. You may sometimes hear John Bell on Radio 4's 'Thought for Today'.

The simplicity of this carol's message will, I am sure, make it increasingly popular and the last two lines of each verse are utterly inspired for Christmas:

***'God surprises earth with heaven,  
Coming here on Christmas Day.'***

I must acknowledge the 'Magnet' magazine of December 1991 for most of the information in the next article.

**"Wise men seeking Jesus" by James Thomas East (1860 - 1937)**

James East was born on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1860, in Kettering, Northamptonshire and was ordained as a Wesleyan Methodist minister in 1886. Like most itinerant ministers, he travelled a great deal, serving in the following circuits : Glasgow ; Daventry ; Peterborough ; Redruth ; Frome ; Driffield ; Cradley ( Staffs.) ; Neath ; Clayton-le-Moors ; Rochdale and Blackburn. Now James East had an ambition, to visit the Holy Land to tread where Jesus had trodden, to see the countryside where our Saviour had lived. Also like most ministers, his stipend was frugal, so he saved for many years to amass the sum he needed to fulfil his ambition.

Just as he had raised the necessary amount of money, a close acquaintance was found to be seriously ill and, as it was long before the National Health Service, in desperate need of financial assistance to pay for the treatment – a real matter of life or death. Although it must have profoundly grieved James East, he immediately went to his friend's aid, sacrificing his chance to visit the shores of Galilee. Some time later, he took a humbler holiday and, as he walked the cliffs on the East coast of England, he came to terms with his frustrated wishes when he realised the truth that you do not have to travel to the Holy Land in order to establish a close relationship with Christ.

Let us look at a couple of verses from his hymn:

**2. But if we desire him,  
He is close at hand;  
For our native country  
Is our Holy Land.**

**5. Fishermen talk with him  
By the great North Sea,  
As the first disciples  
Did in Galilee.**

**7. He is more than near us,  
If we love him well;  
For he seeketh ever  
In our hearts to dwell.**

I sometimes preach at High Town Ragged School in Cradley, where some members of the congregation remember Revd. East. Indeed, one of the men there recalled that his grandparents were caretakers of the Cradley Wesleyan Methodist Church (now demolished), that his parents played with Revd. East's children and that some of the imagery from the carol may have come as a result of walked outings to Clent with the Sunday School. The exercise would certainly have tired them out!

'Wise men seeking Jesus' first appeared in "The Wesleyan Methodist School Hymnal" of 1911, next in "School Worship" of 1926, then in the 1933 "Methodist Hymn Book" The simplicity of the words make it an ideal choice as a children's hymn, but the sentiments are a sermon in themselves – for all ages and denominations – a sermon lived out by the author.

Two tunes are associated with this hymn. The first is 'Worship' by A.H. Mann which was used in both "The Wesleyan Methodist School Hymnal" of 1911 and the "Methodist Hymn Book". The alternative melody, 'Glenfinlas', by K.G. Finlay, was first used with 'Wise men seeking Jesus' in 1951. (This glen runs into Loch Lomond - a useless fact that I offer gratis to those who like "Trivial Pursuits").