

The JESUS we never knew x52. Monday 25 December_2017.

You will hopefully know the joy of a song or a poem catching hold of you. It's as though the song expresses what is in your own heart and soul and by singing it or listening to it you own it as your own. It can even change from being a mere song to an act of worship as it enables us to bow before the Creator of the universe and acknowledge our own smallest compared to God. For me this Christmas it has been the song/ carol:-

O Holy Night (which you have just heard and here are the words on Power Point)

O holy night the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared, and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new glorious morn

Chorus

Fall on your knees
O hear the angels' voices
O night divine
O night when Christ was born
O night divine o night
O night divine

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new glorious morn
Fall on your knees
O hear...

The words and lyrics of the old carol 'O Holy Night' were written by Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure in 1847. Cappeau was a wine seller by trade but was asked by the parish priest to write a poem for Christmas. He obliged and wrote the beautiful words of the hymn. He then realised that it should have music to accompany the words and he approached his friend Adolphe Charles Adams(1803-1856). He agreed and the music for the poem was therefore composed by Adolphe Charles Adams. Adolphe had attended the Paris conservatoire and forged a brilliant career as a composer. It was translated into English by John Sullivan Dwight (1812-1893).



Praising and singing does not just direct us to God so that we fall on our knees but even bring peace between warring peoples.

A well-known Tradition says that Silent Night sounded through the trenches louder than the guns of war on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day of 1914 shortly after World War I began. In a brief, spontaneous truce, the soldiers on both sides of the trenches sang their versions of Stille Nacht and traded rations and cigarettes. A similar tradition surrounds the French carol O Holy Night in an earlier war. During the Franco-Prussian War, a conflict between the Second French Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia in 1870, legend said that a French soldier peered over the top of his trench singing O Holy Night or Canticque de Noel.

Instead of firing at the French soldier, a German soldier peered over the top of his trench singing a Martin Luther song. Vom Himmel Hoch da komm icher or From Heaven above to Earth I Come, a popular Germany hymn of the time. The German soldier sang his carol with as much feeling as the French soldier sang Canticque de Noel. The traditional story said that for 24 hours, the soldiers on both sides held a temporary truce to honor Christmas Day, still singing their respective carols.

*Placide Cappeau felt that his Canticque de Noel poem deserved to become a song, but since he didn't know anything about music he asked his friend **Adolphe Charles Adams** to set his poem to music. Placide had chosen a well qualified friend. At this point in his career, Adolphe Adams had composed over eighty operatic stage works including his masterpiece Giselle in 1841, but this request from a friend challenged Adolphe Adams more than writing scores for orchestras and ballets performed in Paris and Berlin. Adolphe Adams faced the reality that as a Jew, the words of Cappeau's song celebrated Christmas, a day that he didn't observe, and Jesus who he didn't believe was God's son. Despite these obstacles, Adams merged his original musical score with his friend Placide Cappeau's inspired words. Both lyricist and musician were pleased with Canticque de Noel and its first performance took place at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, 1847, in Roquemaure, France.*

In the beginning the French church embraced the song and it quickly became featured in countless Catholic Christmas services. Then it became less popular because of the reputations of both Placide Cappeau and Adolphe Adams. Cappeau left the church later in his life and renounced its teachings. He became an active social radical and freethinker.

The Church leaders also discovered that Adolphe Adams was Jewish. The Church quickly and thoroughly denounced O Holy Night which had become one of the most beloved Christmas songs in France. They pronounced it inappropriate for church services and said that it had a lack of musical taste and did not reflect the spirit of religion, but ordinary parishioners and church goers did not stop singing O Holy Night. By 1855, O Holy Night had been published in London and translated into many languages.

John Sullivan Dwight translated into English was a *Unitarian minister, American music critic, journalist, and ardent abolitionist* translated *O Holy Night* into English. He lived at the Transcendentalist community at Brook Farm, Massachusetts and he was involved in the Abolitionist movement in America. According to one tradition that some historians dispute, John Dwight saw something beyond the story of the birth of the Christ child in *O Holy Night*. He embraced the third stanza of the carol as an expression of his views about slavery and his English translation of the third stanza was published in his *Journal of Music* magazine. The third stanza became especially popular during the Civil War. "Truly he taught us to love one another, his law is love and his gospel is peace, chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother, and in his name all oppression shall cease."

VERSE 2 (Sung by Hillsong congregations today – I wonder if they know that they sing a song written by a radical Catholic who left the church, a tune composed by a Jew and words embraced by an abolitionist and sung during the American Civil War?)

Truly He taught us to love one another
His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains He shall break
For the slave is our brother
And in His Name
All oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy
In grateful chorus raise we
Let all within us praise His holy Name

CHORUS 2

Christ is the Lord
O praise His Name forever
His power and glory
Evermore proclaim
His power and glory
Evermore proclaim

On Christmas Eve 1906, when Placide Cappeau and John Sullivan Dwight had grown old and Adolphe Adams had been dead for fifty years, thirty-three-year-old Reginald Fessenden, a university professor and chemist, read the nativity story from the Gospel of Luke into a microphone and then picked up his violin and played *O Holy Night*. It was the first song to be broadcast over the radio as well as the first radio broadcast, and from its literal translation to its many versions, *O Holy Night* it is a still one of the most recorded and broadcast carols.

Traditional Christmas carols like Silent Night and O Holy Night and their creation stories come from different and often conflicting traditions. They touch the hearts of ordinary and famous people alike and they teach us that Christmas is for both saints and

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sinners. Most of all they show us that saints and sinners can write beloved sacred carols that offer heavenly hope to an earthly imperfect world.

Today we have spoken out together Mary's song of praise – the Magnificat from Luke chapter 1 has been spoken and sung in many forms by Christian believers the world over. Whether it was ecstatically uttered for the first time as Mary spoke it when the angel came to tell her she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit or an early composed liturgy it is a mighty out cry of praise and prophecy about what Jesus Christ would accomplish. It is radically subversive about scattering the proud and lifting up the humble. It is about bringing down mighty kings and lifting up the humble.

The human mind and heart were created to live in relationship with God and from this relationship great creativity flows: art works, music, poetry and so on.

Ephesians 5: 18, 19 Do not get drunk with wine which will only ruin you; instead be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your heart. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father. (Trinitarian praise – Trinitarian birth)