

2019 Christmas Carol Sing-Along

As a culmination of our focus on singing over the past few months, we've put together a Christmas Carol Sing-Along to use in place of one of your small group sessions for December. This Sing-Along can be adjusted to fit your local needs, and can be done in your small group setting or together as a congregation. You can have one or two people leading the evening, or share the readings among the participants and members. Feel free to put the songs in the order of your choosing, or consider adding relevant Bible verses to each carol. Our goal with this Sing-Along is to provide an opportunity for your small group/congregation to come together for a festive evening of singing. May the joy of Christmas be abundant in your gathering!

Joy to the World (548H)

Psalm 98:4 – *Let the whole earth shout to the Lord; be jubilant, shout for joy, and sing.*

The hymn, *Joy to the World*, is a jubilant proclamation of our Lord's birth. The verses are based on an English translation of Psalm 98, and were written and published in 1719 by English hymn writer, Isaac Watts, in his collection entitled, *Psalm of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. It wasn't until 1839 – one hundred twenty years later – that Lowell Mason, an American music teacher and composer, finally put Watts' words to melody, completing the song we sing today.

Away in a Manger (533H and/or 534H)

This beloved hymn is often an integral part of teaching children the basic story of Jesus' birth. It is regularly attributed to German theological reformer, Martin Luther, as "Luther's Cradle Hymn," supposedly written as a lullaby for his own children. However, the lyrics actually may have been taken from a children's Sunday School book published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1885. Regardless, in 1887, writer James R. Murray published the lyrics as Luther's in a collection entitled, *Dainty Songs for Lads and Lasses*.

Deck the Halls (attached sheet music)

The tradition of decorating homes with boughs of holly, mistletoe, fir trees, and other evergreens has existed for centuries. Some believe the practice began with the Romans, and was adopted by Christ-followers as a way of bringing nature into the home during the winter months.

Bringing greenery inside symbolized the coming renewal of life after the dormant winter. It was a reminder of the promise of resurrection. What looks dead will soon enough be green, lush, and very much alive again. This carol may not contain overtly Christian lyrics, but it invites us into the profound Christian practice of reminding ourselves that there is life after death. It calls us to celebrate this reality together with song.

We Three Kings of Orient Are (288C)

(Or if you'd like to try a new song, *Joy has Dawned*, you can purchase the music here: <https://store.gettymusic.com/us/song/joy-has-dawnedangels-we-have-heard-on-high/>)

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh: If you're familiar with the Christmas story, you've heard of the wise men, or "magi," from the east as described in Matthew 2. These men set off on a journey in search of the Christ Child so that they could present Him with gifts. The precise number of magi who visited Jesus is unclear. They are often called the "Three Wise Men" because they brought three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Each of these gifts was quite costly at the time, leading scholars to believe that the men bearing them must have been wealthy themselves, perhaps even kings. But aside from the monetary value, each of these gifts carried a symbolic – some might even say prophetic – significance.

Gold represented royalty or kingship, and in Christ's case, His divinity. Frankincense was a perfumed oil regularly used by priests during religious ceremonies. This gift anticipated that Jesus, though not born into the line of priests, would become our High Priest. Myrrh, another perfumed oil, was the most precious of the three gifts. Worth five times the value of gold,

myrrh was often used in funerals and burial services. This might seem an unusual gift to give a child, but many believe it foreshadowed Jesus' own sacrificial death on the cross. In John 19, Nicodemus prepared Jesus' body for burial by using a mixture of about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (v. 39).

The gifts of gold and frankincense speak to Jesus' role as the everlasting King and Priest of God's people, and the myrrh prophetically points to His death, burial, resurrection, and victory over sin and the grave.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (245C)

John Mason Neale was a British hymn writer, scholar, and Anglican. As a Christ-follower, he spent much of his life dedicated to the hope of reconciliation and unity between the Catholic and Anglican Churches. His calling brought him both praise and persecution, but his hymn writing left a lasting impact on the Church. Neale is credited with writing songs such as *Good Christian Men Rejoice* and *Good King Wenceslas*, and, in 1851, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, which he adapted and translated from Latin into English and set to a melody reminiscent of Gregorian chants.

Matthew 1:20-23 – *But while [Joseph] thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

Silent Night! Holy Night! (560H)

On Christmas Eve 1818, the hymn we call *Silent Night* was born. A Catholic priest named Joseph Mohr wanted to write something to celebrate and reflect on the Christmas season, and so he wrote the lyrics to the song *Stille Nacht* (German for *Silent Night*) from his tiny village in the Swiss Alps. He then traveled almost two miles to a neighboring town to visit his friend and local church organist, Franz Gruber, who composed a melody to match Mohr's lyrics in just a few short hours. That very night, the carol was sung for the first time during the midnight Christmas mass.

Often thought of as the world's most famous Christmas carol, *Silent Night* is now sung and enjoyed around the world in over 140 languages.

Angels We Have Heard on High (278C)

It was once the custom of French shepherds to call out to one another on Christmas Eve, "Gloria in excelsis Deo, gloria in excelsis Deo," or "Glory to God in the highest." The call signified the same proclamation made by the heavenly hosts on the night Jesus was born (Luke 2:14). The French shepherds most likely utilized a Latin song to accompany those verses from Scripture – a song which happens to include the refrain, "Angels we have heard on high." The melody we sing today at Christmastime originated in the eighteenth century, but the lyrics and melody were not published together until 1855.

The First Nowell (561H)

Noel is the French word for Christmas, and is rooted in the Latin word *natalis*, which means "birth." *The First Noel* is a song retelling the story of Jesus' birth. It's uncertain whether the hymn originated in French or English, but we know it is very old, perhaps dating back to the thirteenth century. The English traditionally sang this carol on Christmas Eve while lighting and burning the Yule log, a symbol of light's victory over darkness.

Deck the Halls

Trad.

Deck the halls with boughs of hol - ly, Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 See the bla - zing Yule be - fore us, Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 Fast a - way the old year pas - ses, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

5

Tis the sea - son to be jol - ly, Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 Strike the harp and join the cho - rus. Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 Hail the new, ye lads and las - ses, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

9

Don we now our gay ap - pa - rel, Fa la la, la la la, la la la.
 Fol - low me in mer - ry mea - sure, Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 Sing we joy - ous, all to - ge - ther, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

13

Troll the an - cient Yule tide ca - rol, Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 While I tell of Yule tide trea - sure, Fa la la la la, la la la la.
 Heed - less of the wind and wea - ther, Fa la la la la, la la la la.

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