

Christmas Sunday/Dec. 28, 2014
Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Luke 2:22-40;
Rev. Joel M. Krueger
Carol Sing

History of Christmas Carols

4th Century: The first specifically Christmas hymns for Christians that we know of appear in fourth century Rome. *Corde natus ex Parentis* (*Of the Father's love begotten*) by the Spanish poet Prudentius (d. 413) is still sung in some churches today.^[1]

9th-10th Centuries: the Christmas "Sequence" or "Prose" was introduced in North European monasteries.

12th Century: Parisian monk Adam of St. Victor began to derive music from popular songs, introducing something closer to the traditional Christmas carol.

13th Century: France, Germany, and particularly, Italy, under the influence of Francis of Assisi a strong tradition of popular Christmas songs in the native language developed.^[2]

15th Century: Christmas carols in English first appear in a 1426 work of John Awdlay, a Shropshire chaplain, who lists twenty five "caroles of Cristemas", probably sung by 'wassailers', who went from house to house. The songs we know specifically as carols were originally communal songs sung during celebrations like harvest tide as well as Christmas. It was only later that carols begun to be sung in church, and to be specifically associated with Christmas.

16th Century: Carols gained in popularity after the Reformation in the countries where Protestant churches gained prominence (as well-known Reformers like Martin Luther authored carols and encouraged their use in worship), this was the consequence of the fact that the Lutheran reformation warmly welcomed music.^[4]

18th Century: "Adeste Fideles" ("O Come all ye faithful") appears in its current form, although the words may have originated in the thirteenth century. The origin of the tune is disputed.

19th Century: The first appearance in print in their present form of "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen", "The First Noel", "I Saw Three Ships" and "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" was in *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (1833) by William Sandys. Composers like Arthur Sullivan helped to repopularize the carol, and it is this period that gave rise to such favorites as "Good King Wenceslas" and "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear", a New England carol written by Edmund H. Sears and Richard S. Willis.

20th Century: Continued to see many songs written about Christmas, some religious but many that are more secular. In this century we continue to have songs written and recorded and heard during this short (or not so short - beginning before Halloween on some radio stations!) season of the year.

"Now is Born the Divine Christ Child"/"Il Est Ne, Le Divin Enfant"

We may think of many of our Christmas carols coming from England (wassailers) or Germany but there is a long tradition of French Christmas Carols (*Chants de Noël*) as well. You may know "Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabelle!" (*Un flambeau, Jeanette, Isabelle*), "Angels We Have Heard on High" (*Les anges dans nos campagnes*), "Sing We Now of Christmas" (*Noel nouvelet*) and "O Holy Night" (*Cantique de Noël*).

Often considered the best known traditional French carol, "Il est né, le divin Enfant" comes from the region of Provence. The original version has four stanzas and the refrain.

A variety of translations into English exist, but the one most commonly used today is by George K. Evans (b. 1917), a Kentucky native who served as a music editor for the educational publisher, Prentice-Hall. His translation first appeared in *The International Book of Christmas Carols* (1963), compiled by Walter Ehret. Dr. Evans served as the primary translator for this influential collection.

"Good King Wenceslas"

[John Mason Neale](#) was an Anglican Priest with a desire for returning parts of the Roman Mass to Anglican worship as well as a passion for returning church architecture to its original/ancient grandeur and church music to its medieval roots, translating many hymns from their original Greek, Latin or Syrian languages. Thus he brought to the English language such songs as "Good Christian Men Rejoice" and "O Come, O Come Emmanuel". In 1853, he wrote the lyrics for "**Good King Wenceslas**", in collaboration with his music editor [Thomas Helmore](#), and the [carol](#) first appeared in *Carols for Christmas-Tide*, 1853. Neale's lyrics were set to the melody of a 13th-century [spring](#) carol "**Tempus adest floridum**" ("The time is near for flowering") a 1582 [Finnish](#) song from the collection *Piae Cantiones*. He was harshly criticized by many of his contemporaries for using a Spring seasonal song for a winter season subject!

Neale wrote the song in honor of the Feast Day of St. Stephen, Dec. 26, which is also Boxing Day in England, a day set aside to remember the needy and poor. He chose the historical [Saint Wenceslaus I, Duke \(not really a king\) of Bohemia](#) or *Svatý Václav* of [Czech](#) (907–935), who, like Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was killed for his faith. After the death of his father, the Czech ruler Duke Ratislav, he saw a quick decline in the handling of affairs and so, at age 18 took over the reins of government. He made some changes, seeking good relations with neighboring countries, especially Germany, limited the arbitrary power of judges, encouraged the building of churches and showed heartfelt concern for the poor, even cutting firewood for orphans and widows, and carrying provisions on his own shoulders through the snow. His short reign was ended when he was killed by his brother Boleslav. He was quickly venerated as a martyr and is today the patron saint of Czechoslovakia.

The song tells of a journey Wenceslas makes with his page to help a poor peasant and ultimately encourages those with means to find a blessing in sharing with the poor and needy.

"Do You Hear What I Hear?"

"**Do You Hear What I Hear?**" is a [song](#) written in October 1962, with [lyrics](#) by **Noël Regney** and music by **Gloria Shayne Baker**. The pair, married at the time, wrote it as a plea for peace during the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#). Regney had been invited by a record producer to write a Christmas song, but he was hesitant due to the commercialism of the Christmas holiday. It has sold tens of millions of copies and has been covered by hundreds of artists.

Regney wrote the lyrics for the song, while Shayne composed the music in October 1962 (usually it was Shayne who wrote the lyrics for their songs while Regney composed the music). Regney was inspired to write the lyrics "Said the night wind to the little lamb, 'Do you see what I see?'" and "Pray for peace, people everywhere" after watching babies being pushed in [strollers](#) on the sidewalks of [New York City](#). Shayne stated in an [interview](#) years later that neither could personally perform the entire song at the time they wrote it because of the emotions surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis. "Our little song broke us up. You must realize there was a threat of [nuclear war](#) at the time."

"Do You Hear What I Hear?" was released shortly after [Thanksgiving](#) in 1962. The song was originally recorded by the [Harry Simeone Chorale](#), a group which had also popularized "[The Little Drummer Boy](#)". It went on to sell more than a quarter-million copies during the 1962 [Christmas](#) holiday season. It continues to be a popular Christmas song.