

The Songs of Christmas

ADVENT: Day 11

"GOOD KING WENCESLAS"

*Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gath 'ring winter fuel*

Ask thirty people to say this King's name and you may get thirty different pronunciations. No one seems to know how to pronounce Wenceslaus or Wenceslas, as it is written in most of our hymnals.

There are actually more than thirty possible pronunciations, but the most common in English is Wen – suh – sluh.

The good news is, with more than thirty possibilities, you can't really go wrong. Just say it confidently and everyone will think you're right!

But what may even be lesser known than how to say his name correctly is the story of his life, the inspiration for this classic Christmas hymn.

King Whatever had a really interesting story.

The story behind the song

"Good King Wenceslas" was inspired by the story of an ancient king who was made a saint after his death. He was known as Vaclav the Good, or King Wenceslaus.

The people of the Czech Republic had fallen on hard times. Tradition says that the king was looking out his window and watched a poor man collecting wood. The king asked his servant to find out where the poor man lived and to help him take meat, drink, and firewood to his home.

As the king and his servant ventured out on a very cold night, the servant struggled to walk in the snow.

As the story goes, the king told his servant to step in the king's footprints.

Miraculously, each time the servant placed his foot where the king's foot had been, the servant's feet were warmed. Thus, they delivered the food and helped the family.

Soon, news of the king's generosity spread through the country, encouraging others toward generous living.

Blessed to be a blessing

The last stanza of "Good King Wenceslas" says:

*Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye, who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.*

At Christmas, we give to those we love and to those in need. All of us can "bless the poor" with what we give, whether it be a lot or a little.

The amazing thing about giving is that, when we give what the Lord wants us to give, we find it to be a blessing in our lives as well.

And your lived-out generosity can "warm the feet of others" as they follow in your footsteps. They may see your sacrifice for others this Christmas and be inclined to do the same.

Whom will you bless this Christmas?

May you be blessed for following the example of Good King You-Know-Who.

"The Songs Tell the Story"
An Advent Devotional By: Janet Denison