



The Rt. Rev. David M. Reed, D.D.
Bishop of West Texas
david.reed@dwtx.org

December 20, 2021

"...the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn..."
- O Night Divine

Dear Friends in Christ,

I consider myself a connoisseur of Christmas carols. *And yes, in my experience "O Holy Night" and "Do You Hear What I Hear?" are almost Hymnal-worthy, but **never** "The Little Drummer Boy" or "Frosty the Snowman."* Christmas caroling brings out the best, or at least the loudest, in me. The anonymity of darkness and a festive crowd makes me bold to sing. Over the years, I've started to notice that as the group launches into the second verse of a carol, most carolers (including myself) begin mumbling, though still loudly. By the third verse, musical chaos and harmonic divergence reign. No matter how beloved the song may be, we don't remember - or just don't know - the words.

Challenge your own memory with a little Christmas pop quiz, matching each familiar carol to its more obscure phrases.

Bishop Reed's Christmas Carol Pop Quiz

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. ___ "beneath the heavenly hymn have rolled
two thousand years of wrong" | a. "O little town of Bethlehem" |
| 2. ___ "yet what I can I give him, give my heart" | b. "Christians awake, salute the happy morn" |
| 3. ___ "trace we the Babe, who hath retrieved our
loss, from his poor manger to his bitter Cross" | c. "Lo, how a rose e'er blooming" |
| 4. ___ "where meek souls will receive him, still the
dear Christ enters in" | d. "In the bleak mid-winter" |
| 5. ___ "true man, yet very God, from sin and
death now save us, and share our every load" | e. "It came upon a midnight clear" |

So much of the profound beauty and enduring power of these songs is revealed as the story continues past the first verse. Similarly, the Good News of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, told so poignantly and poetically in the first chapters of Matthew, Luke and John, rests upon biblical and theological truth contained in the chapters that follow. Sometimes, the carols' lyrics reflect Christian responsibility in light of the Incarnation, and sometimes they point toward the fulfillment and completion of the Kingdom when "heaven and nature sing" as one, forever.

For almost two years, we have been wearied and worn down by the pandemic. This Christmas we may need more than to see and hear the story of Christ's birth found in the first verses of our hymns and scripture readings. We may need to see and hear *through* the words we know by memory, to be awakened to the beautiful truth revealed and enlivened by the light that shines on our everyday lives. We may need to linger longer, look more deeply, and listen more attentively, so that we might rediscover the wonders of God's love revealed in the birth of his Son. We may need to sit longer with the Good News, pondering the words and songs so that we might be embraced by the meaning and power of this birth - for us and for the whole world.

For we have received news that proclaims that the iron rule of sin and death is ended; news that transforms human hearts; news that cracks open hopelessness so that a new creation may pour in; news that the way is now open and the road to our true home runs through that manger.

Receive this gift, unwrap and marvel at it. And let us sing and celebrate it.



As we prepare to receive and celebrate this Christmas, a primary concern shared by churches across the Diocese is voiced in a single question, “Will our people come back?” The short answer is, “No one knows.”

But I do know this. We are not intended to simply receive the boundless gift of Jesus, we are called to be the bearers of this gift and to be participants in the telling, and the living, of the Christmas Gospel. Our brothers and sisters who have not yet returned to worship services and ministries at churches across the Diocese are far more likely to come back if someone invites them—if *you* invite them, personally.

If you are excited for Christmas to arrive, longing to sing the carols and hear the news again of that holy night, then you can bet there are plenty of people you know who feel the same way, eager as little children on tiptoe, wanting the true gifts that come with the birth of Jesus. Even if church members we know and love are not ready to come back, our communities are full of people in need of this joy to the world. *Somebody needs you to invite them.*

And what a beautiful gift that will be—gathering with God’s people in the dawning light of our newborn King, feasting on the stories and songs of our salvation. Go further into the stories. Let yourself be drawn more deeply into the carols that stir memories and touch our hearts. Watch expectantly for all that is revealed in that baby in the manger. And come let us—let us all together—come and adore him, Christ the Lord!

Merry Christmas to all, and God bless us, every one!

Love in Christ,

+David Reed
Bishop of West Texas

Answers to Quiz: 1. (c); 2. (d); 3. (b); 4. (a); 5. (c)

