

Noel III (Part 1)

Click on a song title to advance to the lyrics for that song.

[Away In A Manger](#)

[Good King Wenceslas](#)

[We Three Kings](#)

[The Coventry Carol](#)

[It Came Upon A Midnight Clear](#)

[Angels We Have Heard On High](#)

[Silent Night](#)

[Oh, Holy Night](#)

[What Child Is This](#)

[I Saw Three Ships](#)

[Joy To The World](#)

[Deck The Halls](#)

[Notes on the Noel lyrics](#)

Away In A Manger

Away in a manger
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down His sweet head
The stars in the sky
Look down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing
The poor Baby wakes
But little Lord Jesus
No crying He makes
The stars in the sky
Look down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
On Christmas Day

BACK TO INDEX

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

"Hither, page, and stand by me
If thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain."

"Bring me flesh and bring me wine
Bring me pine logs hither
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear him thither."
Page and monarch forth they went
Forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather

"Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good page
Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

In his master's steps he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing

BACK TO INDEX

We Three Kings

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy Perfect Light

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to rein

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light

Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Pray'r and praising, all men raising
Worship Him, God most high

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes of life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice
Alleluia, Alleluia
Earth to heav'n replies

O Star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light

BACK TO INDEX

The Coventry Carol

Lully, lullay, Thou little tiny Child
Bye, bye, lully, lullay
O sisters too, how may we do?
For to preserve this day
This poor Youngling for Whom we sing
Bye, bye, lully, lullay

Herod the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day,
His men of might, in his own sight,
All young children to slay.
That woe is me, poor Child for Thee!
Bye, bye, lully, lullay

BACK TO INDEX

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

It came upon a midnight clear
That glorious song of old
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men
From heaven's all gracious King!"
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing

Still through the darkened skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing

O ye beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow
Look now, for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing
Oh rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing

For lo! the days are hastening on
By prophets seen of old
When with the ever-circling years
Shall come the time foretold
When the new heaven and earth shall own
The Prince of Peace, their King
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing

BACK TO INDEX

Angels We Have Heard On High

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains

Gloria, In Excelsius Deo!
Gloria, In Excelsius Deo!

Come to Bethlehem and see,
Him whose birth the angels sing
Come adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord the newborn king

Gloria, In Excelsius Deo!
Gloria, In Excelsius Deo!

BACK TO INDEX

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ, the Saviour is born
Christ, the Saviour is born

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth

BACK TO INDEX

Oh, Holy Night

Oh holy night
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the 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 and glorious morn

Fall on your knees
Oh hear the angel voices
Oh night divine
Oh night when Christ was born
Oh night divine
Oh night divine

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand
O'er the world a star is sweetly gleaming
Now come the wise men from Orient land
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger
In all our trials born to be our friend

Fall on your knees
Oh hear the angel voices
Oh night divine
Oh night when Christ was born
Oh night divine
Oh night divine

BACK TO INDEX

What Child Is This?

What Child is this, who laid to rest
On Mary's lap, is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh
Come, peasant, king, to own Him
The King of Kings salvation brings
Let loving hearts enthrone Him

This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

BACK TO INDEX

I Saw Three Ships

I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day
I saw three ships come sailing in
On Christmas Day in the morning

And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day
And all the Angels in Heaven shall sing
On Christmas Day in the morning

And all the bells on earth shall ring
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day
And all the bells on earth shall ring
On Christmas Day in the morning

Then let us all rejoice again
On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day
Then let us all rejoice again
On Christmas Day in the morning

BACK TO INDEX

Joy To The World

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven, and Heaven and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders of His love.

BACK TO INDEX

Deck The Halls

Deck the halls with boughs of holly
Fa la la la la, la la la la
'Tis the season to be jolly
Fa la la la la, la la la la
Don we now our gay apparel
Fa la la, la la la, la la la
Troll the ancient Yuletide carol
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

See the blazing Yule before us
Fa la la la la, la la la la
Strike the harp and join the chorus
Fa la la la la, la la la la
Follow me in merry measure
Fa la la la la, la la la la
While I tell of Yule tide treasure
Fa la la la la, la la la la

Fast away the old year passes
Fa la la la la, la la la la
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses
Fa la la la la, la la la la
Sing we joyous, all together
Fa la la la la, la la la la
Heedless of the wind and weather
Fa la la la la, la la la la

BACK TO INDEX

Notes on the Noel lyrics

The Noel collection is comprised of 24 songs that are among the most widely recognized and frequently sung Christmas songs in contemporary Western society. All but four of these 24 songs are Christmas carols in the strict sense, in that they are songs with words that describe the birth of Jesus Christ. The Nativity is referred to only indirectly, by the frequent mention of Christmas, in the lyrics for “Oh, Christmas Tree” and “We Wish You A Merry Christmas”, and the words for “Good King Wenceslas” and “Jingle Bells” contain no references to either Christ or Christmas. These four songs are generally considered to be Christmas carols as well, however, because the term “carol” is usually defined more broadly to include songs that are associated with Christmastime. The noun “carol” is sometimes defined more narrowly as a Christmas song sung by a choir. The verb “carol” means to sing Christmas songs in a choir.

Apart from the spirit and ethos of Christmas, the most important connecting thread among the 24 carols contained in the Noel collection is the fact that they are all songs that are typically sung by a choir. Most of the Noel carols date from the 19th century, during which the tradition of Christmas caroling was developed and was most popular. The caroling tradition is referred to directly in the words for two of the Noel carols (“Deck The Halls” and “We Wish You A Merry Christmas”), and implied in the words for two others (“Hark, The Herald Angels Sing” and “Jingle Bells”). One of the two most notable exceptions regarding the dates of origin of the Noel carols is “The Little Drummer Boy”, which was written in 1958 by Katherine K. Davis, Henry Onorati, and Harry Simeone, and is the only Noel carol that postdates the 19th century. The other is “Good King Wenceslas”, which dates back to 13th century Finland, and is the oldest of the Noel carols.

The melodies for the 24 Noel carols suggest a variety of musical moods, including jubilant, pastoral, reverent, and mysterious. The lyrics for these songs are generally reflective of these many moods, and are no less diverse. This is especially true of punctuation, the use of which varies widely in the original versions of the words for the 24 carols. In editing these words, care was taken to achieve a greater degree of uniformity, and a minimalist approach regarding punctuation was employed. In the edited lyrics for the 24 carols, commas are used only to

separate components of multi-phrase expressions, and periods are used only in association with commas. Exclamation points are used sparingly and are reserved for words or phrases that are clearly exclamatory (for example, Gloria in Excelsis Deo!). Semi-colons have been removed entirely, and there is only a single instance (“The Twelve Days of Christmas”) in which the edited lyrics make use of a colon.

Another important consideration regarding the editing of these lyrics was the inclusion or non-inclusion of specific verses. The original lyrics for all 24 carols contain multiple verses, often as many as four or more, and numerous verses were omitted in the compilation of these edited lyrics. For three of the carols (“Away In A Manger”, “Oh, Holy Night”, and “Hark, The Herald Angels Sing”) only a single verse is given in the edited version. For most of the others, two or three verses are given, and in many instances one or more verses were eliminated. More than three verses were given for two carols (“We Three Kings” and “I Saw Three Ships”) with unusually short verses, and for two others (“Good King Wenceslas” and “It Came Upon A Midnight Clear”) the lyrics for which are elegantly constructed poems that defy abridgement. Besides the length and literary quality of the verses, other criteria used in the selection of verses include the rhythmic suitability of the verses for singing, and the degree to which the verses presented a more ecumenical and less strictly religious conception of Christmas.

Four other specific edits are worthy of mention. In “Away In A Manger”, the line “The stars in the bright sky” was shortened to “The stars in the sky”. This was done mainly because that is how I learned it, but also because the edited line, at least in my view, is more suitable for singing. In “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen”, “This holy tide of Christmas all other doth deface” was changed to “This holy tide of Christmas shall give our sorrows chase” because the edited line is relevant and appropriate, but far less cryptic in its meaning. In “The Twelve Days Of Christmas”, “five golden rings” was changed to “five gold rings”, again because that is the way I learned it, and again because in my view the edited line is more suitable for singing. And finally, in “We Wish You A Merry Christmas”, the six verses were combined into three double verses. This was done to make the carol more suitable for singing by eliminating the need for too many repetitions of the refrain.

The stories behind the origins of the 24 Noel carols are replete with interesting details that in many cases shed light on the carols themselves. Although these details are far too numerous to recount here without exception, a few details are of particular interest, and therefore worthy of mention. For example, two of the melodies for the Noel carols (“Joy To The World” and “Hark, The Herald Angels Sing”) were written by famous classical composers (Handel and Mendelssohn respectively). “The Coventry Carol” is so named because it is the only surviving piece of music from a mystery play performed in Coventry, England in the 16th century. The uncommonly dark mood of this carol is accounted for by the fact that it is the only carol in which the Slaughter of the Innocents, the result of King Herod’s obscene order to slay all newborn male children, is described in the lyrics.

“God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen” (and not “God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen”, as I had incorrectly always assumed it to be) is one of the oldest Christmas carols, dating back to the 15th century, and was originally sung by town watchmen who traditionally received extra pay during the Christmas season. “Jingle Bells”, written in 1857 by James Pierpoint, an American minister, was actually composed in conjunction with a Thanksgiving celebration, and only later came to be popularly associated with Christmas. The various gifts described in “The Twelve Days Of Christmas” are thought to be symbolic representations of Biblical concepts. And finally, in this last connection, the gift on the fourth day was “four coly birds” (and not “four calling birds”, as I had incorrectly always assumed it to be). A coly bird (pronounced `coal-ee) is an African bird with a long tail and ornate plumage, similar in size and shape to a peacock.

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BACK TO INDEX