

## Lessons from the Great Hymns

### "O Holy Night"

December 13, 2017

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#### The Amazing Story of "O Holy Night"

At the end of 1847 the parish priest of a small French town asked Placide Cappeau, the local commissioner of wine, to write a poem to celebrate Christmas and the construction of the parish organ. Cappeau had a gift for writing poetry but was not known for his church attendance. However, he became inspired by the project and, using the gospel of Luke, he visualized placing the reader in the scene of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Cappeau penned "Cantique de Noel" on a trip to Paris. He was so moved by his own work that he commissioned his famed composer-friend, Adolphe Adams to write the music for his poem. Though Adams was Jewish, he created a powerful score to match the beautiful lyrics. The parish priest was overjoyed and the song was performed three weeks later at the Midnight Mass of Christmas Eve.

Though initially the song was widely accepted in France, once church officials realized that Cappeau had become a an irreligious socialist and that Adams was Jewish, the Christmas carol was banned in France for two decades.

However, American minister, John Sullivan Dwight heard the beautiful song and felt it needed an English version. He wrote the inspired English words to "O Holy Night" in 1855. An ardent abolitionist, Dwight strongly identified with the lines of the third verse:

*Truly he taught us to love one another; his law is love and his gospel is peace.  
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother; and in his name all oppression shall cease.*

Dwight's English translation of "O Holy Night" quickly found favor in America, especially in the North during the Civil War. Since then, "O Holy Night" has become nearly equivalent to the national anthem of Christmas, often sung at the peak of Christmas Eve services.

O Holy Night!  
The stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth;  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
'Til 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 angels voices!  
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!  
O night, O holy night,  
O night divine!

V2

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,

With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand;  
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,  
Here came the wise men from Orient land.  
The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,  
In all our trials born to be our Friend;  
He knows our need,  
To our weakness is no stranger.  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend!

V3

Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace;  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,  
Let all within us praise His holy name;  
Christ is the Lord,  
Oh, praise His name forever!  
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!  
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!

### Themes from O Holy Night

1. We were lost in our sin without Jesus, but His Incarnation gives us worth, peace and love. (*Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth... [V3] Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His gospel is peace;*).

**1John 4:8** Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

**11** Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

2. God uses angels to mediate His work in the world (*Oh, hear the angels voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born!*).

**Acts 7: 53** you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

**Hebrews 1:14** Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

3. He knows our weaknesses and our trials ( [V. 2] *In all our trials born to be our Friend; He knows our need, To our weakness is no stranger.*).

**Hebrews 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. **16** Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.