

A Greeting from Earl with Thoughts for this Holy Season

It is my joy at this time as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ to read a poem written by George Herbert (1593-1633) that helps us to understand the significance of what this event of the divine breakthrough in human history offers to the world today.

But first, let me share, in brief, the background of the author, George Herbert. He was honored as “The Public Orator of Cambridge University” where he studied from 1609-1614. He went on to become a Member of Parliament in 1623, and then decided to become a pastor. George Herbert was ordained in the Church of England in 1624 and served as parish priest until his early death at age 39. Shortly before he died, Herbert entrusted what he called *The Little Book of Poems* to his classmate and friend, Nicolas Ferrar. He wrote about his faith in Jesus “in whose service I have now found perfect freedom...I desire him [Ferrar] to read it, and then, if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public.”¹ The poems were published with the directive from the Chancellor of Cambridge Press – I license the whole book to be printed without the diminution or addition of a syllable, save only that Mr.Ferrar had added an excellent preface that is printed before it.²

The impact of Herbert’s writing had a profound influence on C.S. Lewis in his journey of faith. Lewis writes, “Here was a man [George Herbert] who seemed to me to excel all the authors I had ever read in conveying the very quality of life as we actually live it from moment to moment.”³ Herbert’s poems continue to be recognized even to this day. I invite you to hear the choir of my school, Princeton Theological Seminary where I have been inspired while listening to this piece – George Herbert’s poem put to music.

The poem is titled, “The Call.” The opening line says it all, “Come my way.”⁴ The poem is written with Jesus as the speaker. The three stanzas spell out what it means to be Christ’s guest. In “Come my way,” Jesus offers truth and life, nourishment and strength, joy and love. May this assurance be ours in this Christmas season as we visit the stable in Bethlehem where Christ was born to fulfil the promise of God’s will for mankind. We remember that it was the angels who sent the shepherds to the manger saying, “...I am bringing you good news of great joy to all the people: To you is born this day...a Savior...”⁵

May we experience the event of Christmas – the hope offered as a gift now and in the days forward.
Blessings, Earl

1. George Herbert, *The Complete Poems*, Edited by John Tobin. (London: Penguin Books.2004),311.

2. Ibid.

3. C.S. Lewis, *Surprise by Joy*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955),214.

4. NRSV, Matthew 11:28-30. (For the Biblical source of “The Call...Come My Way.”)

5. NRSV, Luke 2: 10,11.

The Call

*Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
And such a Life, as killeth death.*

*Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such A Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.*

*Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:*

Such a Heart, as joys in love.