Christmas Carols
Presented by
John Hancock
MUTUAL
LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

A Merry Merry Christmas

Christmas Carols

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Presented with the
compliments of

John Hancock
Mutual
Life Insurance Company
of Boston, Massachusetts

Christmas Carols

What sweeter musick can we bring
Than a caroll, for to sing
The birth of this our Heavenly King?
—HERRICK

EACH year the Christmas season is ushered in by the singing of Christmas carols and hymns, and we hear again the familiar and ever beautiful songs of Christmas which have been handed down through the centuries, sung in every tongue and by every nation.

An ancient and lovely custom is this singing of Christmas carols, in the streets of our towns and cities, in our homes and churches and schools. It harkens back to the days of old, when carols were sung in the streets by waits and minstrels, when the Yule log burned on the hearth, holly and mistletoe gleamed among the Christmas candles, the boar's head was paraded in grand procession, and wassail songs made glad the festive and joyful Christmastide.

Surviving with all of these picturesque traditions of Christmas are the carols themselves, with their quaint words and delightful melodies. Preserved to us are these original Christmas carols, composed in almost every tongue,—Latin, English, French, Anglo-Saxon, German, Italian, Spanish, and many others — simple folk-songs, charming in their quaintness and naïveté, with a reverent gaiety which only suggests the religious. For a carol, in its true meaning, is a song in which a religious theme is treated in a familiar and festive manner. A hymn is essentially devotional. So it is that many of our more familiar Christmas songs, such as "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "It Came upon the Midnight Clear," and others which we commonly designate as carols, are not in the true sense Christmas carols, but rather Christmas hymns.

We like to think that the first carol ever sung was by the angel chorus on that first Christmas eve, nearly two thousand years ago,

when "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will to men" was caroled over the fields of Bethlehem.

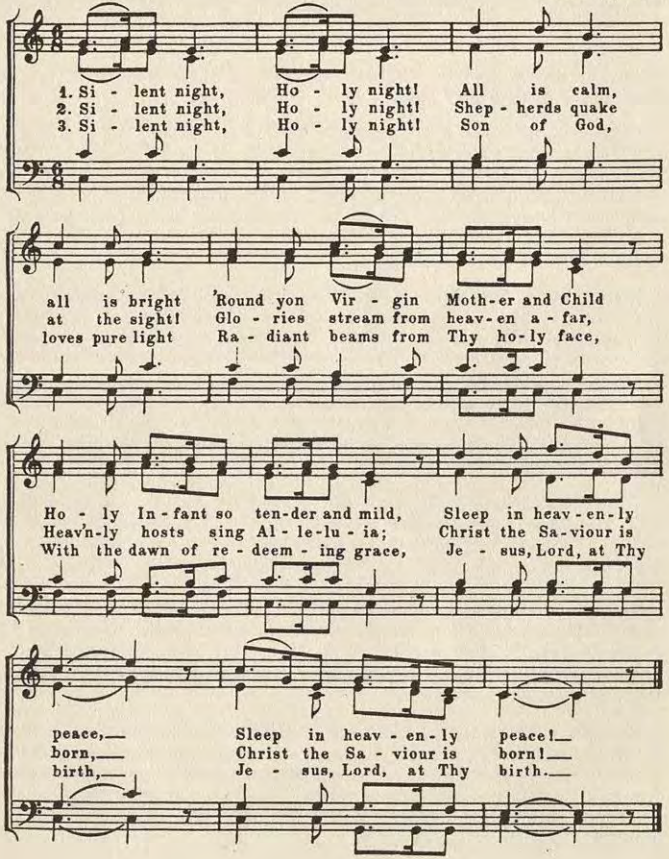
But it is not until the thirteenth century that we find the beginning of the true Christmas carol, and Italy is its birthplace. Here the friars, gathered around St. Francis of Assisi, tried to humanize the story of the gospel and composed songs about the birth of Christ, which they sang around a crèche or tableau, depicting the surroundings of the holy manger. A Franciscan, named Jacopone da Todi, was the first writer of carols.

From Italy the carol spread to Spain, France, England, and Germany, where it retained its folk-song qualities of legendary lore and childlike simplicity, with a strange mingling of reverence and genial mirthfulness. The French Noël began to appear in the fifteenth century as did the Christmas carols in England, where they ranged from charming lullabies to riotous drinking songs. During the Reformation, the true carols with their spontaneity and festive element disappeared, to be replaced later by the more sedate and devotional hymns.

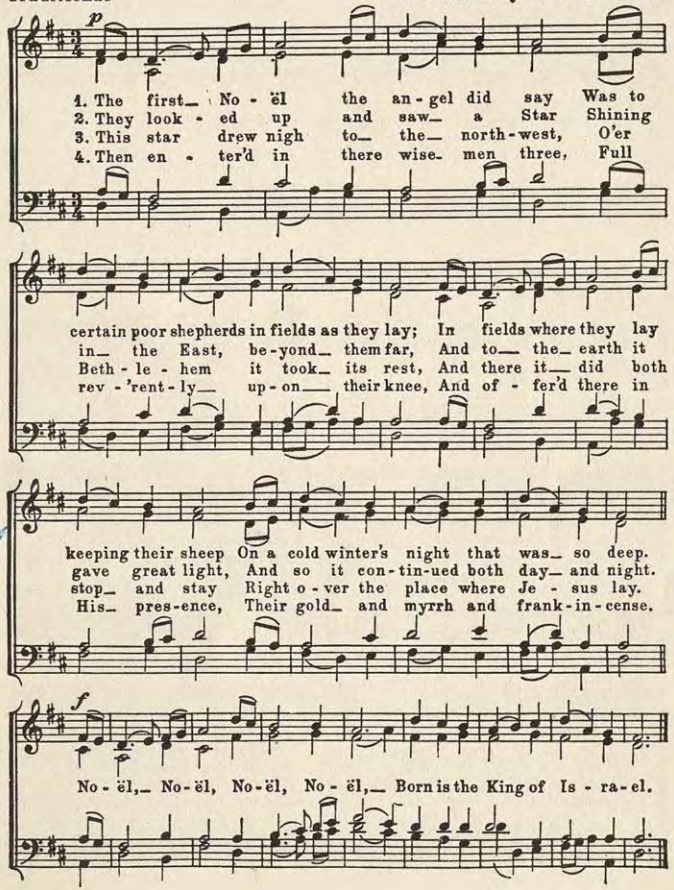
The beginning of the eighteenth century marks the transition from the true carol to the more dignified and solemn Christmas hymn. "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," and "Adeste Fideles" belong to this period. "Adeste Fideles," or "O Come All Ye Faithful," was composed probably in France about 1700 and is perhaps best beloved of the Christmas hymns. The nineteenth century brought the beautiful "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht," also "O Little Town of Bethlehem," written by our Phillips Brooks and inspired by a Christmas eve spent by him in Bethlehem.

Thus the Christmas carols have lived through the centuries. And so, on Christmas eve, as the candles burn in our windows, in remembrance of the Star of Bethlehem, and we hear youthful voices caroling these old familiar songs, let us rejoice that we are preserving ideals and traditions which will be forever the heritage of every Christian nation.

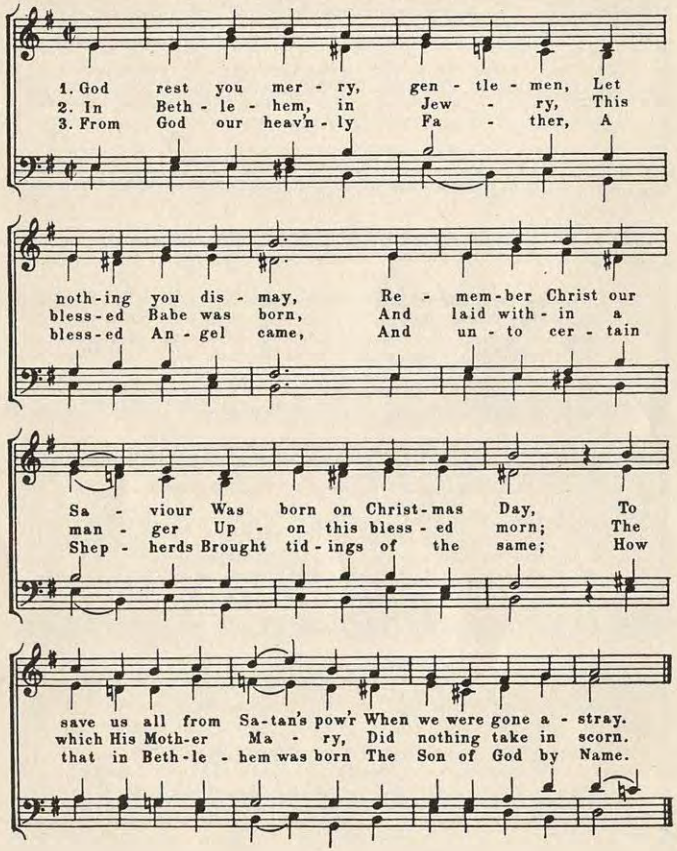
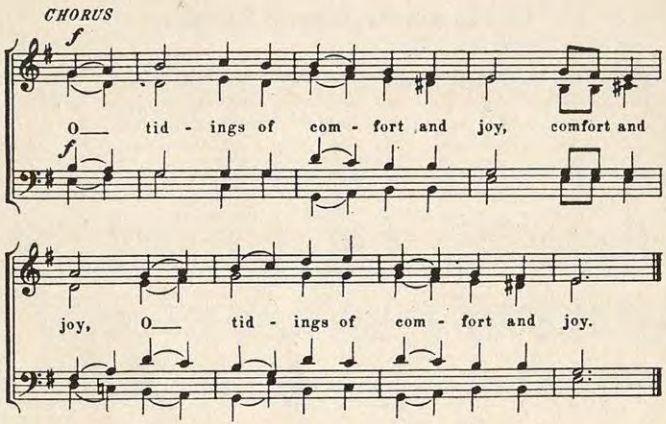
Silent Night
(Stille Nacht)

FRANZ GRUBER

The First Noël

Traditional — Harmonized by Sir John Stainer



God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen

Traditional — Harmonized by Sir John Stainer

CHORUS

4.

"Fear not then," said the Angel,
"Let nothing you affright,
This day is born a Saviour
Of a pure Virgin bright,
To free all those who trust in Him,
From Satan's power and might."
O tidings, etc.

5.

The Shepherds at those tidings
Rejoiced much in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding,
In tempest, storm, and wind:
And went to Bethlehem straightway,
The Son of God to find.
O tidings, etc.

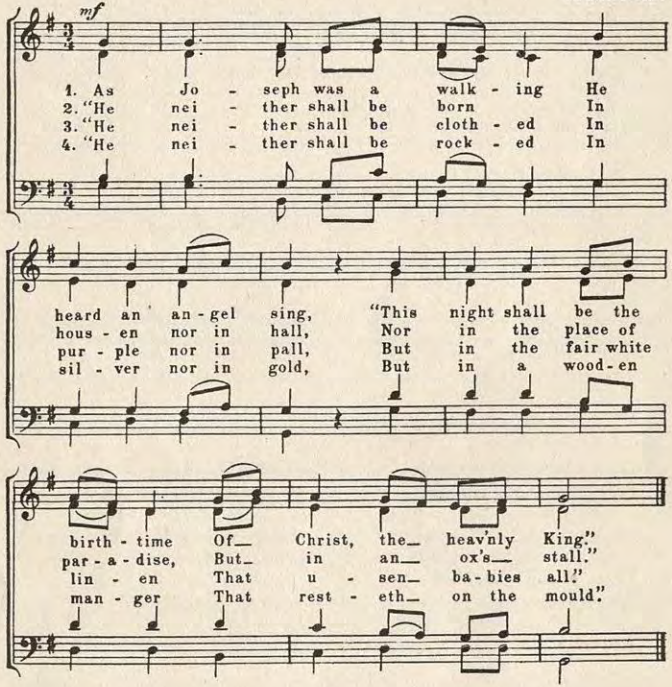
6.

And when they came to Bethlehem,
Where our dear Saviour lay,
They found Him in a manger,
Where oxen feed on hay;
His Mother Mary kneeling down,
Unto the Lord did pray.
O tidings, etc.

7.

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This Holy tide of Christmas
All other doth deface.
O tidings, etc.

The Cherry Tree Carol

Traditional

5.

As Joseph was a-walking,
There did an angel sing,
And Mary's child at midnight
Was born to be our King.

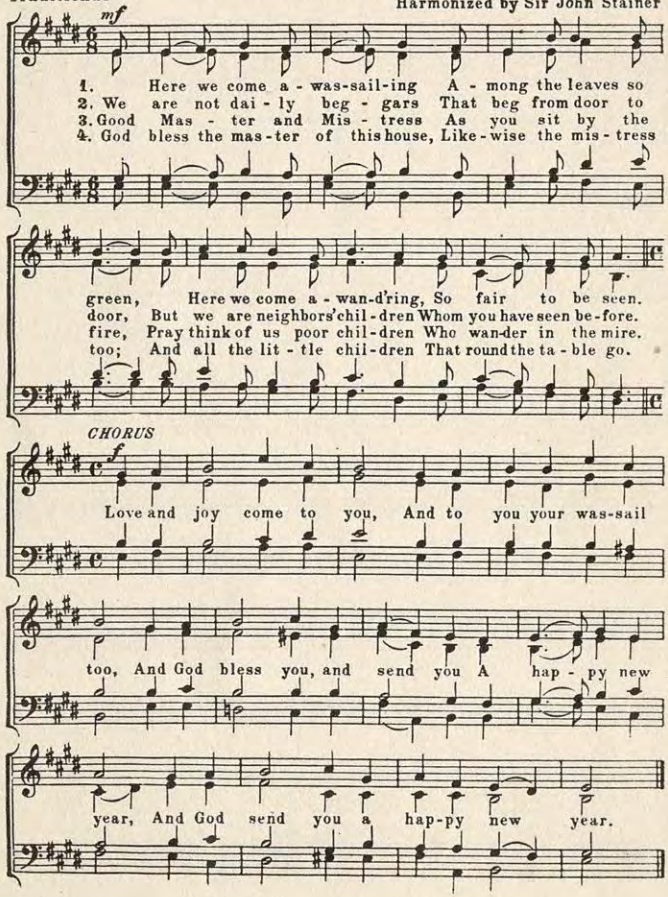
6.

Then be ye glad, good people,
This night of all the year,
And light ye up your candles,
For his star it shineth clear.

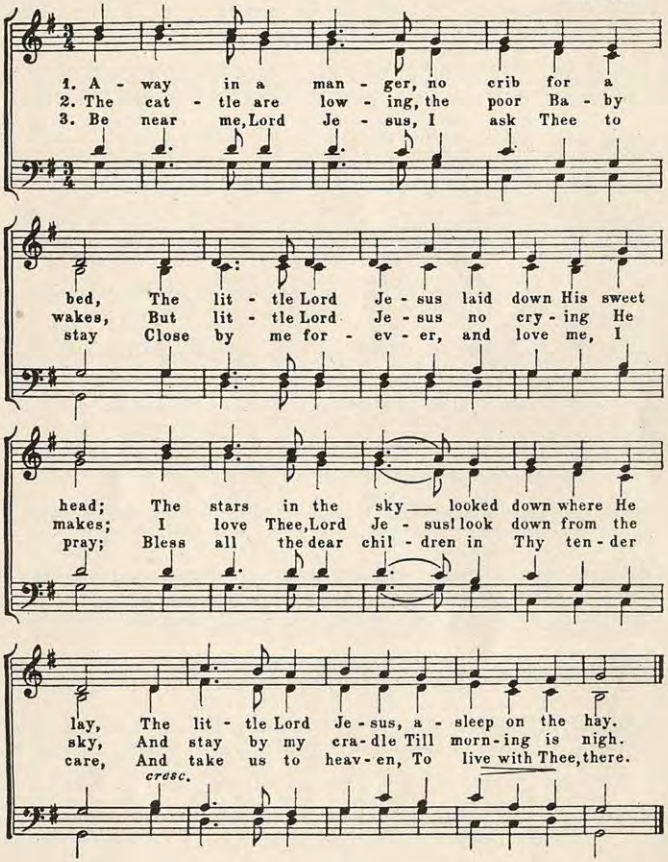
The Wassail Song

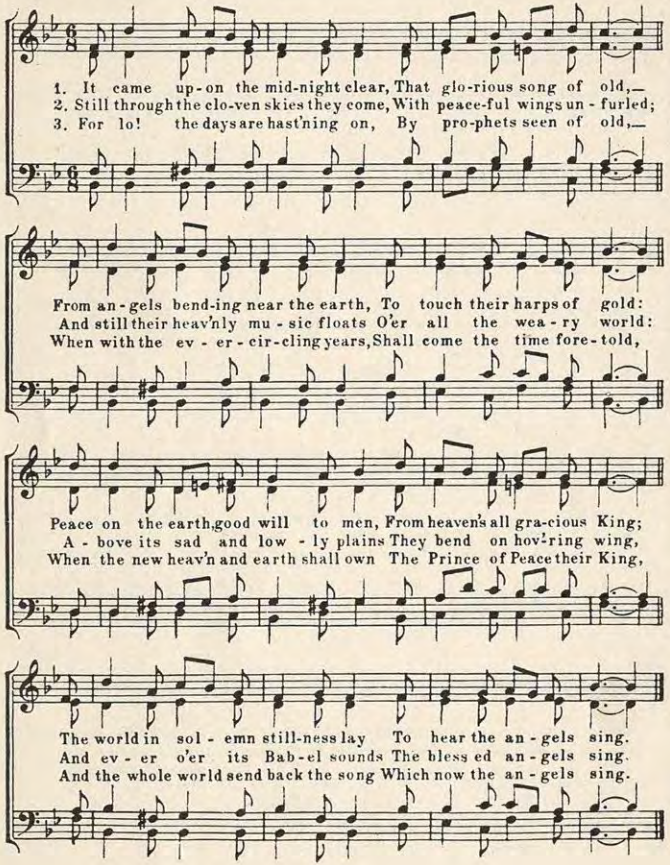
Traditional

Harmonized by Sir John Stainer



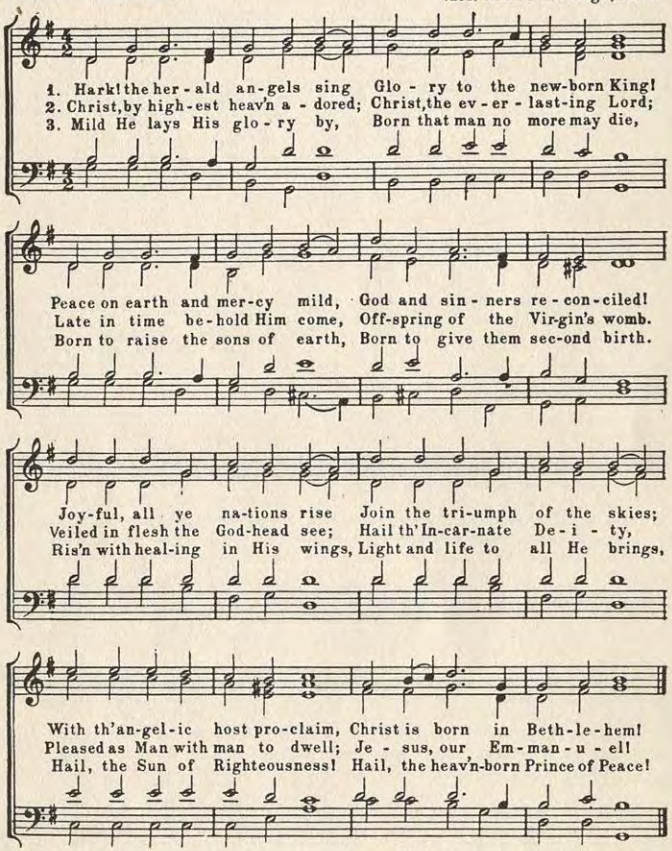
Away in a Manger

MARTIN LUTHER
1483-1546

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

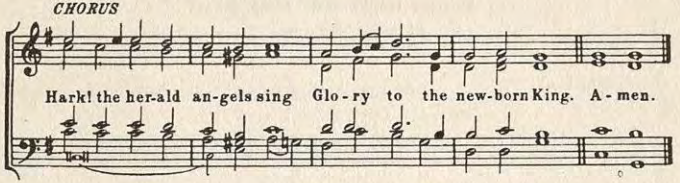
E. H. SEARS, 1846 — R. S. WILLIS, 1850

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

CHARLES WESLEY, 1739

F. MENDELSSOHN
(arr. W. H. Cummings, 1850)

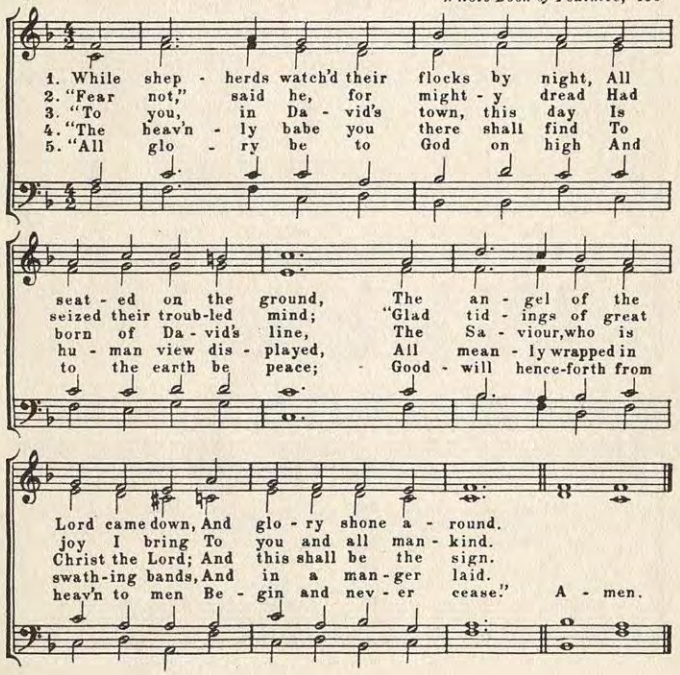


CHORUS



While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

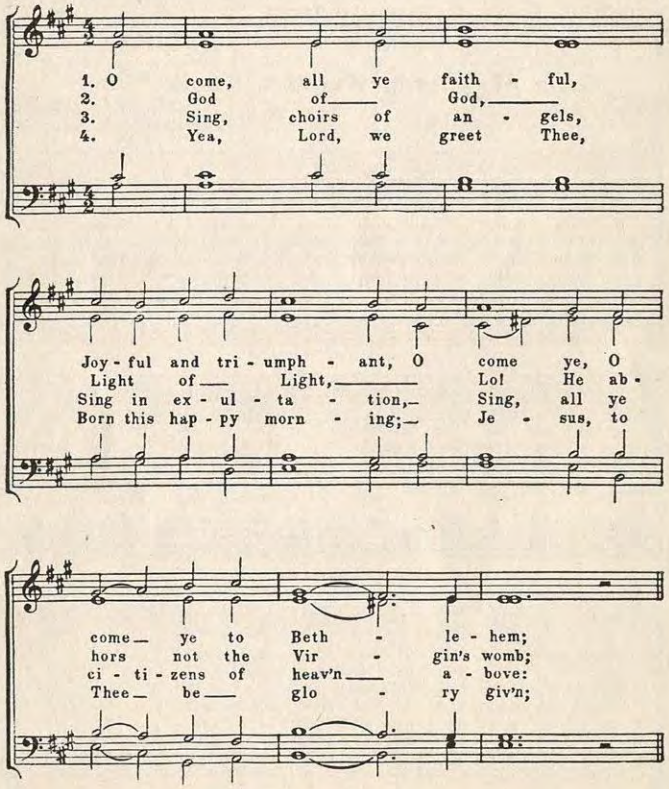
N. TATE, 1702

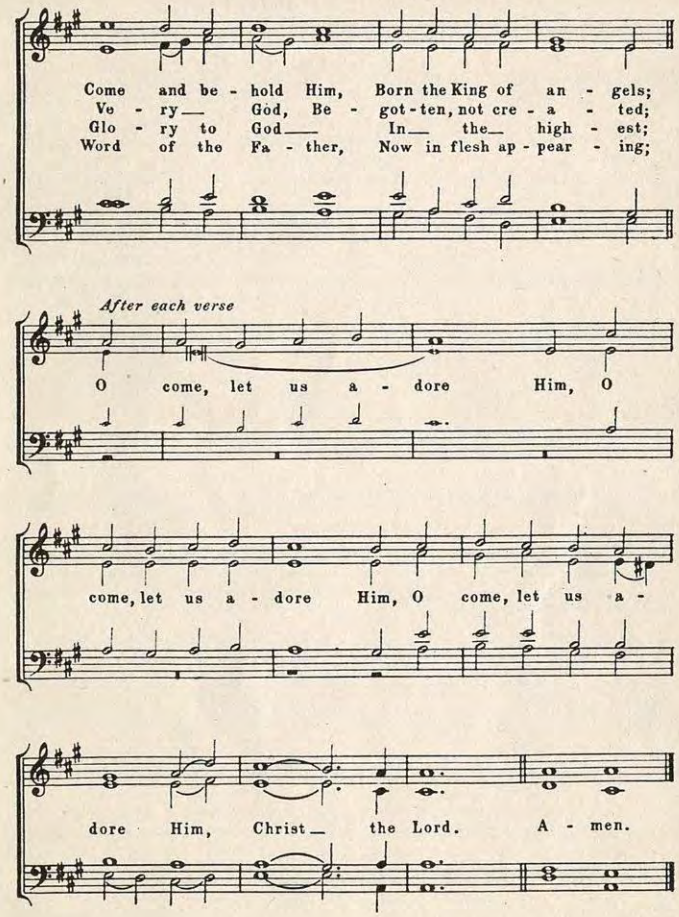
Melody from T. Est's
Whole Book of Psalmes, 159

O Come, All Ye Faithful

(Adeste Fideles)

Tr. F. OAKELEY, 1841

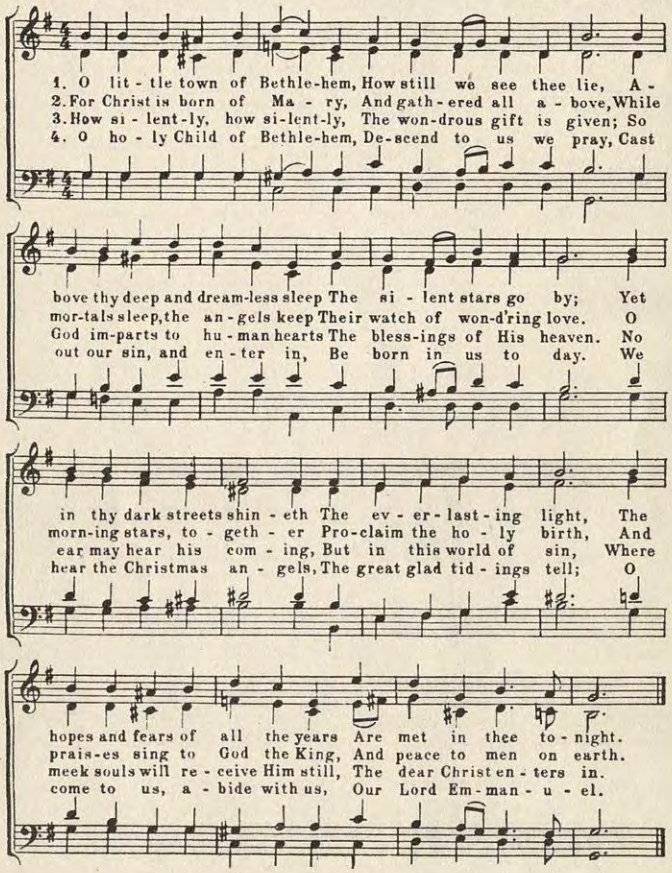
J. F. WADE'S
Cantus Diversi, 1751





O Little Town of Bethlehem

PHILLIPS BROOKS, 1868 — L.H. REDNER, 1868



ISSUE NO. 115

A Happy New Year