TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Daniel Balch/Opening Prayer by: Don Taylor
Morning Assembly Song Leader: River Lucy

#396 There's Not a Friend
#869 We're Marching to Zion
Scripture Reading by: Joseph Girard
Oft We Come Together
Communion Devotional by: Craig Girard
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#538 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
Sermon: "Paul on Trial"
Acts 23:12-24:27

#912 Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary
#851 I'll Fly Away
Closing Prayer by: River Lucy

Welcome by: Daniel Balch

Evening Assembly Song Leader: Bobby Rader

#509 I Will Sing the Wondrous Story
I Want to Be a Worker

Opening Prayer: David Smith
#853 When We All Get to Heaven

Sermon: "How to Celebrate Christmas"
Romans 14:4-6

Is They Heart Right with God?
#414 Anywhere Is Home

Closing Prayer: Wayne Noonkester

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Dec. 4, 2022

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

The First Noel

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him"… And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. **(Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11)**

Our current hymnals are the first ones I ever recall seeing feature "The First Noel," though it seems that it has been published in *The Methodist Hymnal* for many years (among others). It is one of my favorite carols, but it is not a song that I had ever really thought about singing in the worship assembly before. On further reflection, there is no real reason for that feeling; there is nothing troubling about it doctrinally, though it does conflate the stories of the shepherds and the wise men. Perhaps that initial, visceral reaction all boils down to the difference between a carol and a hymn.

You probably know that from the very beginning of the church, Christians have been *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord* **(Eph 5:19).** The Greek word translated hymn simply means "a song in praise of God." The point here is not to distinguish particular types of music, but to comprehensively describe the content. You can see something of that in our songbooks when we find that we have accidentally turned to a song we thought we knew, but we find that the tune is completely unfamiliar: hymns can be in different musical settings because, properly speaking, a hymn is the text itself, not the melody or harmony. Thus we find that some hymns we still sing are very ancient indeed, focused as they are on imparting deep truths about God, his nature, and his works in the world, particularly in and through Christ.

Carols have a different origin. The word is derived from the Old French *carole,* a circle dance that was accompanied by singers. These were very popular during the High Middle Ages; ultimately, the types of songs sung came to be separated from the dances and used in festivals. While we associate carols with Christmas, this was a folk tradition linked to holidays throughout the Christian year. These were songs that would have been sung outside of church—especially since the medieval mass was very limited on congregational participation—and spread orally, used to transmit (semi)biblical teaching to the largely illiterate population of the day.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Gary Nielsen is in Methodist Hospital.

Howard Duhon has been placed on hospice care.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Geri Cryer, Steve Ward, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ka'Leisha Jones, Linda Frank, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Susan McCain, Gary Nielsen

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Myrtle Sheffield, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Deacons meet today at 4:15 p.m.

Elders, Deacons, Minister meeting Monday, Dec. 5th at 6:30 p.m..

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, Dec. 6th at 8:00 a.m.

We will have a meal on Wednesday, Dec. 7th at 5:30 p.m. in the family life center.

Primetimers will have a Christmas party on Tuesday, Dec. 20th at 6:00 p.m. in the fellowship room. Bring a $10 gift to exchange. It will be a potluck dinner.

Sympathy

We extend our sympathy to Judy Jones and her family on the passing of her mother, Tina Garcia She passed away Tuesday.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Zach Arthur	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Daniel Balch	
Don Taylor	Danny Balch	
Robert Ward	Walden David	
	Gus Tristan	

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

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"The First Noel" emerged from this carol tradition. Its earliest certain attestation is 18th century Cornwall; it was not published until 1823 in *Some Ancient Christmas Carols*, edited by Davies Gilbert. But it is thought that its roots in the oral tradition go back at least to the 15th century, and perhaps even as early as the 1200s. It stands out for a couple of reasons: first, as was noted above, carols were originally sung throughout the year at various festival days, and this one, technically, is not connected to Christmas, but to Epiphany; second, the presence of this strange word "Noel."

Let's deal with the second one first. You probably know that "Noel" is the French word for Christmas; it's likely, then, that it originated in northern France, just across the English Channel from Cornwall, which is located on the southwestern tip of Great Britain. (Indeed, some older folk versions of the song from Cornwall have it as "O well, O well, the angels did say…" because the unfamiliar "Noel" sounded a lot like "O well.") But that still doesn't explain what "Noel" actually means. Most argue that it is from the Latin word *natalis*—birth. Another possibility is related to the French *nouvelle* meaning "new"—that is, something to tell. In either case, the connection is clear: it's a reference to the message of the angels to the shepherds in the field, with their news that *unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord* **(Luke 2:18).**

Perhaps more interesting is that, while the first verse of the song references those shepherds—*the first Noel, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay*—the bulk of the song is concerned not with them, but with the magi who pursue the infant Jesus in **Matthew 2.** The next several verses are all concerned with seeing a star in the east and following it to the place where Jesus lay. As noted above, on the liturgical calendar, that is not Christmas, but Epiphany: January 6, the feast that commemorates the visit of the wise men.

Whether focused on them or the shepherds, though, the song invites us to appreciate the good news that the King of Israel has come. God is fulfilling his promises! He has done what he always said he would do! That's a message that is worth singing about and thinking about, even if the two stories are a bit garbled. It's unfortunate that most printed versions—including the one in our book—omit the final verse that drives it all home:

Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made heaven and earth of nought,
And with his blood our life hath bought.

Bryant Perkins