

WE NEED A LITTLE CHRISTMAS,
RIGHT THIS VERY MINUTE."

"Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God" (Luke 2:13 NIV).

We could not discuss the music of Christmas without spending a serious amount of time talking about carols and the Christ. Christmas carols celebrate the birth of Jesus. The earliest Christmas carol seems to date back as far as 129, when a Roman bishop presented a song to be sung during a Christmas service in Rome. The term "noel" is also used, especially for carols of French origin.

The word carol actually means dance or a song of praise and joy. Carols used to be written for all four seasons, but only the tradition of singing carols at Christmas has carved its place in history. Popularity of carols would ebb and flow during the years, but by the Middle Ages – around the 1200s – most people had lost interest in celebrating Christmas at all.

Carols have several features that set them apart from other types of songs, including hymns. Let's think about two characteristics that make them unique. First, for at least a month carols can be heard not just in churches, but in elevators, on the radio and across loud-speakers in shopping malls. You cannot imagine "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" being played on a secular FM radio station.

In addition, the Christmas carol is one of the few areas of American culture where public religious expression is still allowed and accepted. Nativities, Scripture readings and even prayers have been banned in the public square, but the carol can be heard or sung during the Christmas season by anyone anywhere.

The church may not have a better means of teaching the message of the Gospel to an "un-churched" world than through Christmas carols.

Hark! The herald angels sing!

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CAROLS & THE CHRIST

Do you have a favorite Christmas carol?

My favorite carol is actually about the Second Coming of Jesus, not the first.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) paraphrased Psalm 98 into two parts in 1719. "Joy to the World" was taken from the second part, verses 4 through 9.

It was over a century later that Lowell Mason, Boston's leading Presbyterian hymn composer, set the hymn to music. At one point, it was the most published Christmas carol in the United States.

Choose to celebrate the coming of the King with your songs and your shouts while the choice is yours. Let your knee bow, let your tongue confess.

When He comes again, the choice won't be yours.

