

O Come All Ye Faithful

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Date: 14 December 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read.
- John chapter 1. John 1. If we read again at verse 14. The familiar words of John 1, verse 14.
- And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- As you know, we're asking the question, what is the gospel according to Christmas carols? What is the gospel according to Christmas carols? Last Lord's Day we were considering the impact and the influence of singing Christmas carols.
- Because for many people in our communities, as we said, they may not call themselves religious or even regular churchgoers. And yet at this time of year, they enjoy singing Christmas carols.
- [1 : 1 3] And we should encourage people to sing Christmas carols because they're not an obstacle to the gospel. You know, at one time I thought Christmas carols were an obstacle to the gospel.
- But the more I've studied them, I've realised that they're not an obstacle to the gospel at all. They're actually an opportunity to share the gospel. Because many of them, as we mentioned on Sunday evening, many of them were written out of this desire to teach sound doctrine through song.
- And we'll see that in our carol this evening. But as I mentioned to you already, the article, this article I keep coming back to, the article called The Gospel According to Christmas Carols.
- It's an article that was written by a young pastor in America. And he said, We call them Christmas carols because they're really Christian hymns, celebrating the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour.
- For a few weeks each December, these profound songs of worship become part of the holiday atmosphere. And our society's pervasive interest in them provides us with a unique opportunity to share the gospel.
- [2 : 2 1] It's the perfect time, he says, to explain the meaning of these songs to those who don't know Christ and share the good news of the gospel with them. And that's what I want us to do again this evening.
- I want us to just consider another Christmas carol and see that it's not an obstacle to the gospel. It's an opportunity to share the gospel. Because as we've discovered already, these Christmas carols, they're full of theology.
- Full of theology. We saw that in Isaac Watts' evangelistic prayer, Joy to the World. Where he said, Joy to the World, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King.
- Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing. We saw it in Wesleyan, Whitfield's evangelistic proclamation. Hark the herald angels sing.

Glory to the newborn King. And this evening, I hope you have all your sheet in front of you. I'd like us to consider the Christmas carol, which has an evangelistic plea.

[3 : 23] O come, all ye faithful. O come, all ye faithful. And as you can see, there are four verses in this Christmas carol. So we have four headings.

Four verses, four headings. A gospel call. A gospel creed. A gospel choir. And a gospel confirmation. A gospel call.

A gospel creed. A gospel choir. And a gospel confirmation. So you see there in verse one of the Christmas carol, it has a gospel call. It says, O come, all ye faithful.

Joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold Him. Born the King of Angels. And then there's the chorus. O come, let us adore Him.

O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him. Christ the Lord. O come, let us adore Him. O come, let us adore Him. This Christmas carol has often been credited or attributed to the 18th century English hymn writer, John Francis Wade.

[4 : 27] However, it's actually been dated as far back as the 13th century. But John Francis Wade, he often gets the credit for this Christmas carol.

Because as well as being a hymn writer, he was also a copyist. He was a copyist of musical manuscripts where he would find all these old musical manuscripts in libraries.

And he would copy them. He would write them out in his nice handwriting. And he had such beautiful calligraphy or handwriting that his clients would often ask him to sign his name at the bottom.

So when he would copy out a manuscript, he would sign his name, John Francis Wade, at the bottom. Hence the reason why O come, all ye faithful, has been attributed to this man, John Francis Wade.

But it was printed in 1751, as you can see there. But when it was originally written, it was originally written in Latin. And in Latin, as with many Christmas carols, in Latin it was known as *adeste fidelis*, which means come, faithful ones.

[5 : 38] *Adeste fidelis*, come, faithful ones. But it wasn't until 1841 that this Christmas carol, it was translated into English by an English clergyman called Frederick Oakley.

And like Isaac Watts' evangelistic prayer, Joy to the World, and Wesleyan Whitefield's evangelistic proclamation, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, this Christmas carol, it comes with this evangelistic plea.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, born the King of Angels.

And you know, it's an evangelistic plea, not to come to a place, or to a priest, or to a pope, but to a person. We are to come to the person of Jesus Christ.

We're to come to the person of Jesus Christ. Because as, I won't call him my good friend, I'd love to make him my friend, Sinclair Ferguson. He reminds us in his brilliant book, *The Whole Christ*.

[6 : 48] If you haven't read it, read it. The book, *The Whole Christ*, in that book, Sinclair Ferguson reminds us that the gospel is Jesus Christ. The gospel is the whole portion of Jesus Christ.

Sinclair Ferguson says, He is the whole Christ.

And that's what we're reminded here. We're to come to the person of Jesus Christ. There's this evangelistic plea to come to the whole person of Jesus Christ.

Because the gospel is not just a proclamation. The gospel that we present, we are presenting a person. And as you know, this gracious and glorious gospel invitation to come.

We're to come to the person of Christ. And that gospel invitation, it's issued throughout the Bible more than 500 times.

[7 : 54] 500 times you hear the word, this imperative, come. Which it only ought to emphasize and exhort to us. That we are to come to the person of Jesus Christ.

And keep coming to him. We're to come to the person of Jesus Christ. And keep coming to him. Is that not why Isaiah said in Isaiah 55, you probably learned it as a child.

And as Isaiah goes on, he says, Incline your ear and come to me.

Hear and your soul may live. We're to come to the person of Jesus Christ. And keep coming to him. It's a gracious and glorious invitation.

Because as the Bible says, as our Bible concludes in the book of Revelation. It tells us that the spirit and the bride say, come. Let the one who hears say, come.

[9 : 00] And let the one who is thirsty, come. In fact, it was Jesus, as you know, he issued that great invitation. Come unto me. And I will give you rest.

And so we're to come to the person of Jesus Christ. Christ. And keep coming to him. And you know, the test of faith. The test of faith is that we keep coming to him.

That's the test of faith. The test of faith is that we keep coming to the person of Jesus Christ. We keep coming to him with our sins and with our shortcomings. We keep coming to him with our burdens and all our baggage.

We keep coming to him with all our heartaches and all our heartbreaks. We're to keep coming to the whole Christ. We're to come to him and keep coming to him.

We're to come to him and keep coming to him. And you know, but the one thing I've often struggled with about this Christmas carol is the opening line. O come all ye faithful.

[10 : 06] You know, the truth is, if you're anything like me, you don't feel faithful. You don't feel faithful. You feel more like a failure. You feel more, you can associate with Asaph in Psalm 73, that we were just singing.

We can say what Asaph said and sang, My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never. For of my heart God is the strength and portion forever.

We struggle with this gospel invitation, O come all ye faithful. Maybe we would love it more if it said, O come all ye failures. But the thing about this gracious and glorious gospel invitation, and we know this, the qualification for coming to the person of Jesus Christ, and the qualification to keep coming to him, is not, am I good enough?

Or am I worthy enough? Or am I faithful enough? No, the qualification is, am I fainting? And am I failing?

Am I worried? And am I weary? Am I burdened and backslidden? Am I distressed and distraught? Am I anxious or apprehensive? Am I tired or troubled?

[11 : 24] Am I struggling with sin or sickness or suffering or sorrow? And if I am, if I am struggling, then I must come to him. I must come to the whole Christ, and I must keep coming to him.

I must depend upon him and him alone. Because it's not that we are faithful. Oh no. It's that he is faithful. That's why there's this great and glorious gospel invitation to us.

Again tonight. We are to come as the Lord's people and keep coming to him. That's why he says, O come all ye faithful. And how are we to come?

Joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him. Born the King of angels. O come, let us adore him.

O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. Why? Because he is Christ the Lord. And so we see, first of all, a gospel call.

[12 : 30] Then secondly, in the second verse, we see a gospel creed. A gospel creed. We read there, God of God, light of light eternal.

Lo, he abhorge not the virgin's womb. Very God, begotten, not created. And then there's the plea. Come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him.

O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. Now verse 2 of this Christmas carol, it sets before us, as we said, a gospel creed. In fact, it sets before us, as you'll see on the other side of your sheet, the Nicene Creed.

So it's the Nicene Creed. The word creed, as you know, it comes from the Latin credo, meaning I believe. Therefore, a creed is a belief statement.

It's a belief statement which affirms true doctrine and avoids heretical doctrine. And if you remember, towards the end of last year and the beginning of this year, that we were studying the Apostles' Creed, which is one of the earliest Christian creeds in the church.

[13 : 38] But as you know, there are other Christian creeds. There's the Athanasian Creed, which was produced in the 6th century because of a heretical view on the Trinity and the relationship that exists between the Trinity, between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But there's also this creed, the Nicene Creed, which was produced in the 4th century due to this heretical view about the person, the whole person of Jesus Christ.

And you know, to neglect or even to negate any of our creeds or our confessions or our catechisms, we do so at our own peril.

You know, we are in a privileged position in the 21st century. We stand on the shoulders of theological giants. And we are so privileged.

But although we stand on the shoulders of theological giants, there was one giant in the early church that created the Aryan controversy.

[14 : 41] It was called the Aryan controversy. Now, you might be tempted to think, well, what does a 4th century heresy have to do with us here in the 21st century tonight?

But it was the church historian, Dr. Nick Needham, he taught me in HTC when I was there. And this is what he writes in his book. He said, the Aryan controversy was the greatest theological controversy in the history of Christianity.

It was centered on the most fundamental of all questions. Who is Jesus Christ? Is he God in flesh or is he a created being?

Is he God in flesh or is he a created being? And the Aryan controversy had centered around a heresy called Arianism, which was introduced and influenced by this popular preacher in the early church called Arius.

Because Arius had this understanding or this view that Jesus was, he couldn't envisage that Jesus was actually God.

[15 : 47] And so he taught that Jesus was created by God. And he based his teaching upon Paul's teaching in Colossians chapter 1 where Paul writes that the image of the Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

And so by Paul saying that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation, Arius said, well, he must have been created by God before anything else was created.

So Arius claimed that prior to the creation account in Genesis 1, God the Father created his only begotten Son. In fact, Arius argued that Jesus could not possibly be God because that would mean that there are two gods.

How can a God create another God? And you know, as you can appreciate, it gets quite confusing. Which is why we should always be so thankful for our creeds and our catechisms and our confessions which teach the truths of Scripture.

But the Arian controversy had come to a head in the year 325 AD. 325 AD. It was when Constantine, who was the first Christian emperor over the Roman Empire, he sought to unite the whole church by calling together the first ecumenical church council.

[17:10] And he called it together in Nicaea. And he brought together over 300 church leaders to discuss and to debate Christology, the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ.

And the outcome was that in 325 AD, the council of Nicaea, they drafted this doctrinal statement known as the Nicene Creed.

Which reads as follows. You can read it with me. We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, light from light, through God from true God, begotten, not created, of the same essence as the Father, through him all things were made, for us and for our salvation.

He came down from heaven. He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again according to the scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.

[18:31] His kingdom will never end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son and with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.

He spoke through the prophets. We believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead and to life in the world to come.

Amen. As you can read from the middle section of the Nicene Creed which is focused upon the person of Jesus, you can see there why this Christmas carol is considered a gospel creed or even a Christmas creed because verse 2 of the Christmas carol, it's almost lifted out from the Nicene Creed.

You can see that. It's lifted out and it's sung as part of this Christmas carol. God of God, light of light eternal, lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb, very God begotten, not created.

So it's a gospel creed. Now as I said, you might be tempted to think what does a 4th century heresy have to do with us in the 21st century?

[19:50] But the truth is even though Arianism or the doctrine of that Arius proposed and proclaimed, even though it was denied and declared a heresy way back in the 4th century, this heresy lives on today.

Arianism has just been rebranded. Rebranded as Jehovah's witnesses. Jehovah's witnesses, which makes it very relevant to all of us this evening because as you know, Jehovah's witnesses, they are present and they are prevalent within our communities.

They have a kingdom hall which they built recently in Stornoway and sadly, you could probably say that they're more passionate in their outreach than we are because they're always doing door-to-door work and we always see them standing in the streets in Stornoway.

But what they're spreading and I'm not afraid to say it, what they're spreading is lies. And it's lies because like the heresy of Arianism, they claim that Jesus is the Son of God, yes, but he's not God.

They say that Jesus was created by God. He's lesser than God and inferior to God. But our Bible clearly claims and our creeds clearly confess that Jesus Christ, as we read there, Jesus Christ is the only Son of God.

- [21 : 27] He is begotten from the Father before all ages. He is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not created.
- And this is important. It's integral to understand because if Jesus is not God, if he's not God, then he's not the Messiah. He's not a miracle worker.
- He's not our mediator. If Jesus is not God, we do not have a substitute. We do not have a saviour. We do not have salvation.
- We are, as Paul says, we are of all men most miserable. My friend, if Jesus is not God, then there's no gracious and glorious invitation to give to people.
- If he's not God, then we cannot, we cannot call and compel sinners with the words of this Christmas carol and say to them, O come, let us adore him.
- [22 : 30] O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. Why? Because he is Christ, the Lord. He is Christ, the Lord. And so Jesus, as the Nicene Creed, confesses and confirms he is God.
- He's Lord of Lords. He's King of Kings. And that's why, as you see in verse 3, that's why there's a gospel choir at his birth.
- A gospel choir. So we've seen a gospel call, verse 1, a gospel creed, verse 2, and a gospel choir, verse 3. A gospel choir, where we're told there, sing choirs of angels, sing in exaltation, sing all ye citizens of heaven above, glory to God, glory in the highest, and then the plea, come, let us adore him.
- O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him. Christ, the Lord. I don't know if any of you watched the Acclaim Christmas concert that was in the Free North last Saturday evening.
- It was in the intimations, by the way, there was a link towards it on YouTube. Acclaim, they are a Christian gospel choir. They consist of men and women from the north of Scotland. And their singing is beautiful to listen to, with all the parts and all the harmony, something I cannot do.
- [23 : 59] Stephen's very good at it, but I cannot do it. But that's the amazing thing about a gospel choir. The thing about a gospel choir is that the lyrics are not only sung from the head, the lyrics are also sung from the heart.
- And you see that with the Acclaim gospel choir. There's this promotion and praise in their singing. There's acclaim and adoration in their singing.
- There's exaltation and exhortation in their singing. And that's what we see here even in verse 3 of this Christmas carol. There's this exhortation to sing.
- To sing with exaltation. That's what we're told. There's this imperative sing choirs of angels. Sing in exaltation.
- Sing all you citizens of heaven above. Glory to God. Glory in the highest. We're told again and again sing, sing, sing. We're to sing with the choirs of angels who as we saw on Sunday evening they sang at the birth of the Saviour.
- [25 : 03] They sang glory to God in the highest and on earth peace goodwill towards men. We're to sing. We're to give glory to God. We're to ascribe and attribute worth in our worship because that's what worship means.
- Worth-ship. Worship is worth-ship. We're to ascribe and attribute worth. All the worth to the Lord because he's worthy of our worship.
- He's worthy of all glory, honour and praise. So we're to sing. Sing, sing, sing. And we're to sing because you know that singing is good for you.

I probably mentioned this to you before. Singing is good for you. It's not only good for you as you worship God in your heart but it's also good for your head as you worship God in your head because singing is scientifically proven to improve your mental health.

Singing is scientifically proven to improve your mental health. And you know this is something that's repeatedly picked up on in the Psalms time and time again.

[26 : 17] It's good for us to worship the Lord. It's good for us to sing praise to the Lord. It's good for us. The Psalmist says time and time again it's good for us to ascribe and attribute worth to the Lord.

It's good for us. And you know it's so true isn't it because when we're at our lowest when we feel we're at our weakest as Christians when we feel vulnerable as the Lord's people when we feel far away from the Lord you know it's then I often think it's then we should stop sinking inward and start singing upward.

Stop sinking inward and start singing upward. It always reminds me of Martin Luther. He used to say to his good friend Philip Melanchthon during the Reformation the Reformation was a very dark and very dangerous and the Reformers often had down days because there was so much opposition towards them but in those moments when they were downcast Luther would say to Philip Melanchthon come Philip let's sing the 46th Psalm.

Let's sing. Why? Because it's good for us to worship the Lord. It's good for us to sing praise to the Lord. It's good for us to ascribe and attribute worth to the Lord.

It's good for us to sing as it says there in the carol. Sing, sing, sing. So sing in church. Sing at work.

[27 : 53] Sing at home. Sing in the bath. Sing in the shower. I'm sure some of you do it. Sing when washing the dishes. Sing when driving in your car. Sing, sing, sing.

And you know that's what we're singing in Psalm 47. Not Psalm 46 as Luther did but Psalm 47 the psalmist said sing praise to God. Sing praise. Sing praise.

Praise to our King. Sing ye. So we're exhorted to sing, sing, sing to the King with exaltation. And we're to do it because we're part of this gospel choir.

Our life is to be a life of praise to the Lord. Our life is to be a life of praise to the Lord. And so in this Christmas carol there are four verses four headings.

A gospel call a gospel creed a gospel choir and lastly and very briefly a gospel confirmation. A gospel confirmation it says there in verse 4 of the carol Yea Lord we greet thee born this happy morning Jesus to thee be all glory given word of the Father now in flesh appearing.

[29 : 10] And then the evangelistic plea O come let us adore him O come let us adore him O come let us adore him Christ the Lord.

As we said this Christmas carol it concludes with a gospel confirmation. The confirmation that Jesus is the word of the Father now in flesh appearing.

And that's what John described here in his prologue in his gospel as John introduces his gospel that's what he says he says that Jesus is the word of the Father now in flesh appearing.

And you know John's gospel is very interesting because unlike Matthew's gospel and Luke's gospel John doesn't begin his gospel with the birth narrative of Jesus he doesn't begin with the stable in Bethlehem or the wise men coming with their gifts or even the angels of heaven singing praise no John takes us all the way back takes us all the way back to before the beginning John takes us on a journey into eternity and he begins by echoing the opening words of Genesis he echoes Genesis 1 verse 1 in the beginning God and he begins his gospel by saying in the beginning was the word and the word was with God the word was God he was in the beginning with God all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made in him was life and the life was the light of men the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it but John doesn't leave it there because he tells us down in verse 14 he says that same word that was in the beginning with God and was God and existed before time itself that word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory the glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth and tonight we have seen his glory in the gospel that's what Paul reminds us the God who spoke into the darkness of creation and shone out his light he has shone his light into the darkness of our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ we have seen his glory the glory is of the only begotten of the father full of grace and truth and so this

Christmas carol it presents to us the gospel the gospel according to Christmas carols so four verses four headings a gospel call a gospel creed a gospel choir and a gospel confirmation and it comes with this evangelistic plea O come let us adore him O come let us adore him O come let us adore him why because he is Christ the Lord he is Christ the Lord well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray together O Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for thy word and we give thanks for men being able to explain thy word even through songs and we pray that even as we study these things together that they would encourage us that they would remind us that we stand on the shoulders of giants those who have had to deal with heresy in the past and yet formulate and come together with creeds creeds that confess what the scriptures say and encourage us and enable us to make that same confession and we thank thee

[33 : 17] Lord that we are able to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father bless us Lord we pray help us to learn help us to be taught help us to be students of thy word that we would be able to speak a word in season that we would be able to encourage those who may even take these words upon their lips that they would know of whom they are singing they are singing about a great saviour a saviour who became flesh and dwelt among us all so that we might behold his glory the glory is of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth bless Lord thy truth to us then we ask uphold us we pray as thy people and help us we ask to serve thee a right to bring glory to thy name go before us and we pray for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake Amen we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of

Psalm 95 Psalm 95 in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 95 page 357 and like the Christmas carol it has the same evangelistic plea O come where we're told in verse 1 O come let us sing to the Lord come let us everyone a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation and then verse 6 the same plea O come and let us worship him let us bow down with all and on our knees before the Lord our maker let us fall so we'll sing verses 1 to 6 of Psalm 95 to God's praise O come let us sing to the

Lord come let us everyone a joyful noise sing to the rock of our salvation let us before his presence come with praise and thy voice let us sing to him with grace and make a joyful noise for God a great God and great

King above all God's deities depths of the earth are in his hand the strength of his his his to him thus patience he belongs for he the same did me the dry man also from his hands is for my first day oh come on let us worship him let us bow down with all and on our knees before the

Lord our maker let us fall the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen