

American Minute with Bill Federer

Christmas Tree, Lights, Poinsettia, White House Christmases, "I Heard the Bells..." & other Carols

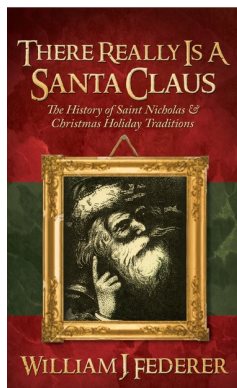
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From the birth of the Church, courageous



missionaries spread Christianity ... [continue reading ...](#)

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[There Really is a Santa Claus -History of Saint Nicholas & Christmas Holiday Traditions](#)

In the 5th century, **Saint Patrick** evangelized the **heathen Druid tribes of Ireland**.

In the 6th century, **Saint Augustine of Canterbury** baptized 10,000 heathen **Anglo-Saxons in England**.

In the 7th century, the "**Nestorian**" **Christian missionary** named **Alopen** traveled from Syria to Persia then across the

trade routes to **China**.



During the **T'ang Era**, Christianity came to be known as the "**Luminous Religion**" - **Jǐng Jiào**.

Emperor T'ai Tsung, founder of the **Tang Dynasty**, examined the **Scriptures** and **ordered their translation**.

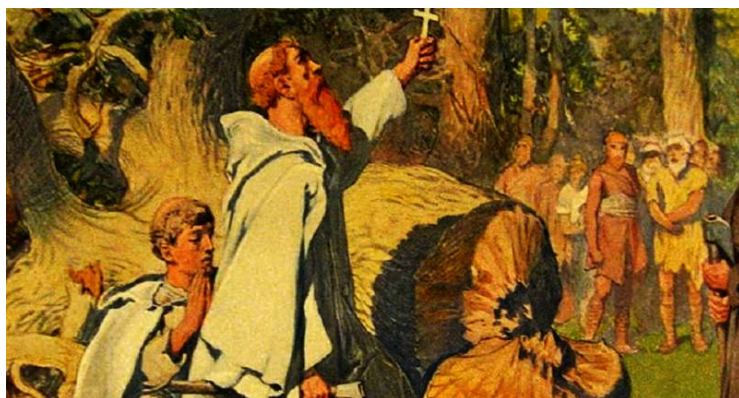


He had a **Christian monastery** built in his capital.

His successor, **Emperor Kao Tsung**, had a **Christian monastery** built in **each province**.

Ancient Christian Chinese manuscripts were called "**Jingjiao Documents**." Some were discovered at Dunhuang, including one titled "**Hymn to the Trinity**."

In the 8th century, ten years before Charles Martel stopped the Islamic invasion of France at the Battle of Tours, the courageous **Saint Boniface** evangelized the **heathen Germanic tribes**.



Boniface, 680-755, also called **Wynfred**, left his home in Britain, near Crediton, Devonshire, and went as a **missionary**, sent by Pope Gregory the Second, to be **Apostle of the Germans**.



Just like **Saint Nicholas** confronted the pagans of



Greece and **Rome**, and **slapped Arius** for starting the Arian Heresy: and just like **Saint Patrick** confronted the **Druid pagans** of Ireland; **Saint Boniface** set out to **confront the pagan Germanic tribes**.

He explained to the clergy in England, that he was called to:

"... seek to obtain by your prayers that **our God and Lord Jesus Christ**, who **wills that all men should be saved** and should come to the knowledge of the truth, may convert the

hearts of these **heathen Saxons** to the faith, that they may be **delivered out of the snares of the devil.**"



In 722



A.D., **Boniface** traveled through the deep woods and came upon pagan chieftain Gundhar, who was about to offer the little Prince Asulf as a human "bloody sacrifice" to **Thor, the feared pagan god of thunder.**

They believed **Thor** lived in the huge "**donar**" oak tree at Geismar.

"**Thor**" is the namesake of **Thor's day**, or "**Thursday**." Since **Thor** was a pagan diety, **Quakers** did not use his name, so they referred to **Thursday** as "**Fifth Day**."

Another pagan Germanic god was "**Odin**" or "**Woden**," for whom was named "**Woden's Day**" or

"Wednesday," which Quakers called **"Fourth Day."**

Providentially, Boniface **interrupted their pagan ritual.**

He boldly took an ax and began chopping **down Thor's mighty "blood" oak.**

Some yelled for him to stop, but others responded that if **Thor** were a real god he could protect his own tree.



This is similar to the **Book of Judges**, chapter 6, when the Lord told **Gideon**:

"Throw down the altar of Baal ... and **cut down the grove** that is by it ...

Then **Gideon** took ten men ... and did as the LORD had said unto him ...

And when the men of the city arose early ... behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and **the grove was cut down** ... they said one to another, Who hath done this thing? And when they enquired ... they said, **Gideon** the son of Joash ...

Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and **because he hath cut down the grove** ...

And Joash said ... **Will ye plead for Baal? ... if he be a god, let him plead for himself."**

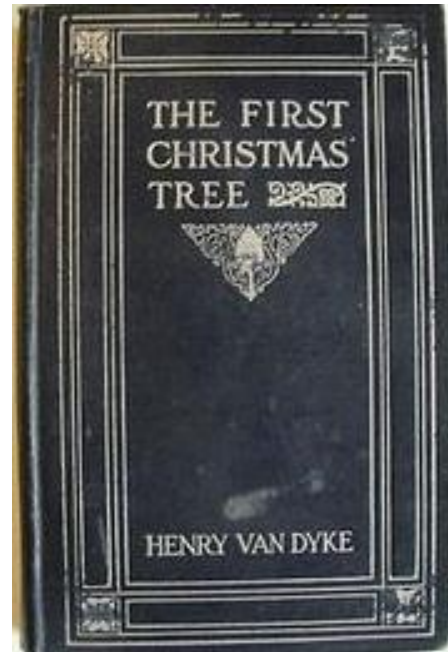
As **Boniface** was chopping down **Thor's tree**, by some

accounts, **an enormous wind** swept in and **helped blow it over.**

The heathen throng was in awe.

They **rejected** their defeated **pagan gods of Thor and Odin** and **converted to Christianity.**

Henry Van Dyke, who was appointed by President Woodrow Wilson as Ambassador to the Netherlands and Luxembourg, wrote *The First Christmas Tree*, 1906, in which he gave the rendition:



"The day before Christmas, in the year of our Lord 722 ...

Through the wide forest that rolled over the hills of central Germany ... at the head of the band marched **Wynfred** ...

'Courage, brothers, and forward yet a little ... this **Christmas eve** ... For this is the Yuletide, and the heathen people of the forest have gathered at the **thunder-oak of Geismar** to worship their god, **Thor.**



Strange things will be seen there, and deeds which make the soul black. But we are sent to lighten their darkness; and we will teach our kinsmen to keep a **Christmas** with us such as the woodland has never known ..."

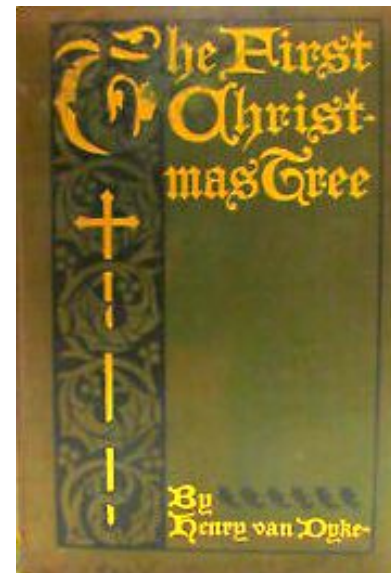
Henry Van Dyke continued:

"A great throng of people were gathered around it in a half-circle ... answered **Wynfred**, '... from England, beyond the sea, have I come to bring you ... a message from the **All-Father**, whose servant I am ... **Worship not the false gods**, for they are **devils**. Offer no more **bloody sacrifices** ...'



A troubled voice of assent rose from the throng. The people stirred uneasily. Women covered their eyes. Hunrad lifted his head and muttered hoarsely, 'Thor! take vengeance! Thor! ...'

Wynfred beckoned to Gregor, "Bring the axes, thine and one for me. Now, young woodsman, show thy craft! The king-tree of the forest must fall, and swiftly, or all is lost!" The two men took their places facing each other, one on each side of the road. Their cloaks were flung aside ... They grasped the axe-halves and swung the shining blades ...



The axe-heads glittered in their rhythmic flight, like fierce eagles circling about their quarry. The broad flakes of wood flew from the deepening gashes in the sides of the oak. The huge trunk quivered ...

Then the great wonder ... out of the stillness of the winter night, a mighty rushing noise sounded overhead ...

A strong, whirling wind passed over the tree-tops. It

gripped the oak by its branches and tore it from its roots. Backward it fell, like a ruined tower, groaning and crashing as it split asunder ...

Wynfred let his axe drop, and bowed his head for a moment in the presence of Almighty Power ...

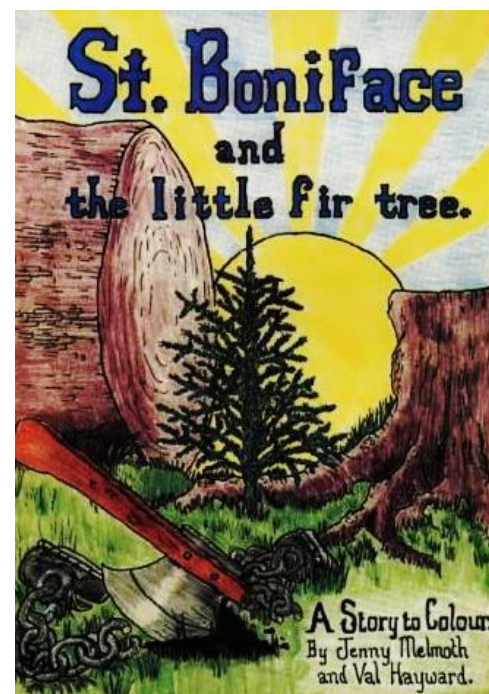
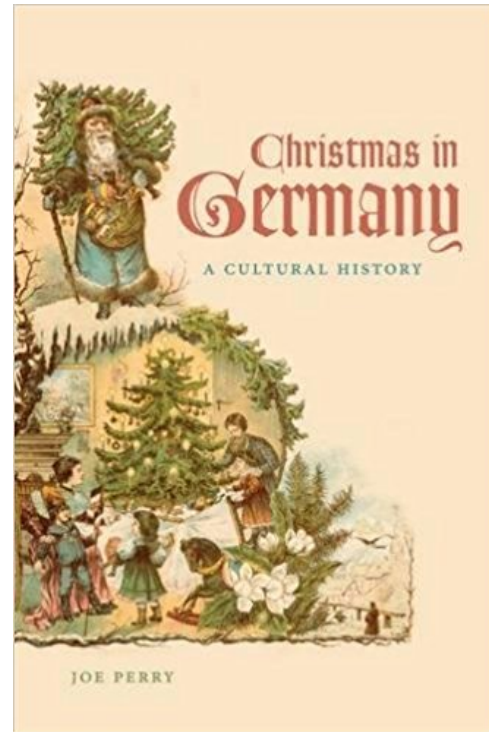
'This is the word, and this is the counsel,' answered **Wynfred**,

'Not a drop of blood shall fall to-night ... For **this is the birth-night of ... Christ, son of the All-Father, and Savior of mankind ...**

Since **He** has come to earth the **bloody sacrifices must cease**. The dark **Thor**, on whom you vainly call, **is dead**. Deep in the shades of Niffelheim he is lost forever. **His power in the world is broken**. Will you serve a helpless god? See, my brothers, **you call this tree his oak**. Does he dwell here? Does he protect it?'

... Then he turned to the people, '**Here is the timber ... on this spot shall rise a chapel to the true God' ...**

'And here.' said he, as his eyes fell on a **young fir-tree, standing straight and green**, with its top pointing towards the stars, **amid the divided ruins of the fallen oak**, 'here is the **living tree, with no stain of**



blood upon it, that shall be the **sign of your new faith**. See how it **points to the heavens**. Let us call it **the tree of the Christ-child ...**

You shall **go no more into the shadows of the forest** to keep your feasts with **secret rites of shame**. You shall keep them at **home**, with laughter and song and **acts of kindness**.

... **The thunder-oak has fallen ...** the day is coming when there shall not be a **home** in all **Germany** where the children are not gathered around the **green fir-tree** to rejoice in the **birth-night of Christ' ...**

Then **Wynfred** stood beside the chair of Gundhar ... and told **the story of Bethlehem**; of the **babe in the manger**, of the **shepherds on the hills**, of the **host of angels** and their midnight song.

All the people listened, charmed into stillness."

Boniface founded the Benedictine Monastery in Fritzlar, Germany, and outside the beautiful Saint Peter's Church there is a statue of Saint Boniface standing on the stump of a large oak tree holding an axe in his one hand and a church in the other, memorializing how he cut down Thor's pagan oak and brought Christianity to the Germans.

Ever since, the evergreen tree has been a symbol of Germans converting to Christianity.

The **evergreen tree** has a long history of significance. In the Middle East, there is an **evergreen** that can live for centuries called a **tamarisk tree**. It is slow-growing, and can grow in very dry, saline, alkaline soil, resulting in it being called a salt-cedar.

Genesis 21:33-34 recorded:

"Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time."

The cedars of Lebanon were used to panel the interior of **Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem**, as the wood has a pleasant scent, and very durable, being resistant to rot and insects.

The first century **"Jesus Boat"** used on the Sea of Galilee was of cedar.

The **cedar fir tree** is mentioned in the **Book of Ezekiel 17:22-24**:

"Thus says the **Lord God**: 'I will take also one of the highest branches of the high **cedar** ...

and **will plant it on a high and prominent mountain.**

On the mountain height of Israel **I will plant it**; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a **majestic cedar.**


... Under it will dwell birds of every sort; **in the shadow of its branches** they will dwell.

And all the trees of the field shall know that **I, the Lord**, have brought down the high tree and **exalted the low tree."**



On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar.

Ezekiel 17:23a



It will become a

majestic cedar

Birds shall nest in it, and find rest in its branches.

Ezekiel 17:22-23

ourshelteringtree.blogspot.com

Second-century Christian theologian **Tertullian** encouraged believers to reject heathen temples:

"You are a **light of the world**, and a **tree ever green**, if you have renounced temples."

Symbols were helpful in **teaching illiterate people groups** the concepts of **Christian doctrine**.

Similar to **Saint Patrick** using the **three-leaf clover** to teach the **Trinity**, **Saint Boniface** is said to have used the **evergreen tree's triangular shape** to explain the **Trinity**.

For centuries, **Germans hung the triangular-shaped evergreen tree** from the ceilings of their humble homes as a **Christian symbol of the Trinity** -- "**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**" Matthew 28:19.

An article in *Christianity Today*, August 2008, commented:

"Legend has it that he used the **triangular shape of the Fir Tree** to describe the **Holy Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. The converted people began to revere the **fir tree as God's Tree** ...



By the 12th century it was being hung, upside-down, from ceilings at **Christmastime** in Central Europe, as a **symbol of Christianity**."

Johannes Brahms wrote the most recognizable Lullaby in 1868, which in the original German mentioned the "Christkindleins Baum" -- the Christ-child's tree:

Guten Abend, gute Nacht -- Good evening, good night.
Von Englein bewacht -- By angels watched,
Die zeigen im Traum -- Who show you in your dream
Dir Christkindleins Baum -- The Christ-child's tree.
Schlaf nun selig und süß -- Sleep now blissfully and
sweetly,

Schau im Traum 's Paradies -- See the paradise in
your dream.

Of note, **St. Boniface** is the name of the **largest French-speaking community** in all of **Western Canada**.

It is located in **Winnipeg**, the city for which author **Alan Alexander Milne**, in 1926, named his character **Winnie-the-Pooh**, who made friends wandering in a **deep 100 acre forest**.

LIGHTS ON THE TREE

Martin Luther, 1483-1546, is credited with popularizing the tradition of **putting of lights on the tree**.



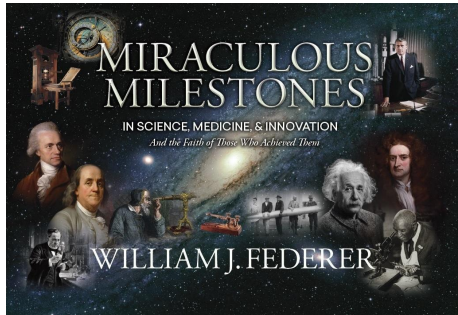
In 1520, **Martin Luther** was walking home on **Christmas Eve** under the cold December sky and noticed the countless stars illuminating the night.

Luther returned home, and to the delight of his wife and children, set up an **evergreen tree** placing a great number of **small candles on its branches**.

He set up a **nativity creche scene** under the tree so that the lights would appear as the **stars above Bethlehem on the night of Christ's birth**.

The nativity scene was an addition to the Christmas traditions added by **Saint Francis of Assisi** in 1223.

An inspiration for the **candles** at this time of year may have also come from Jewish families, who for over a thousand years had been celebrating the Festival of Hanukkah, to remember how they courageously drove Syrians out of their land and rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C.



[MIRACULOUS MILESTONES in Science, Medicine & Innovation - And the Faith of Those Who Achieved Them](#)

KRIS KRINGLE

Martin Luther added something else. He thought Saint's Days were a distraction from Christ, so he ended them in Protestant countries, including the popular December 6th, St. Nicholas Day.



But Germans like the gift-giving associated with it, so Luther moved the gift-giving to December 25th and said all gifts come from the Christ Child, which in old German was pronounced **Christkindl**, later came to be pronounced "**Kris Kringle.**"

POINSETTIA

Another **plant** took on **Christmas significance** in the early 1800s. In 1829, the **first U.S. Ambassador to Mexico** was **Joel R. Poinsett.**



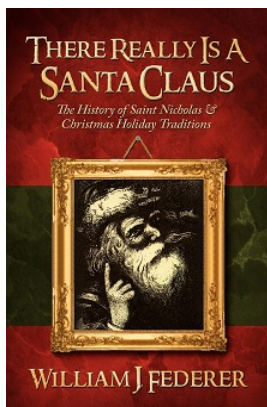
He brought back a plant called "**Flower of the Holy Night**" - **Flores de Nochebuena**.

The legend is, that in the 16th century, a poor girl named Pepita or Maria, was wanting to bring a gift to church for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus on Christmas Eve.



She knelt and prayed along the roadside and the crimson blossom sprouted up. The shape symbolizes the Star of Bethlehem and the red color represents the crucifixion.

Ambassador Joel Poinsett brought the plant back to his farm in South Carolina and planted it, giving rise to it being called "**Poinsettia**."



[There Really is a Santa Claus- The History of Saint Nicholas and Christmas Holiday Traditions](#)

OFFICIAL CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY

In 1836, **State of Alabama** became the **first state** to officially recognize **Christmas Day** as a **holiday**.

Eventually, **every state** recognized **Christmas Day** as an **official legal holiday**.

CHRISTMAS TREE IN WINDSOR CASTLE

The German tradition came to

England in 1848, when **Queen Victoria** and **Prince Albert** published an engraving of the **Royal Family in Windsor Castle**, celebrating around a **Christmas Tree**.



FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE IN WHITE HOUSE

In 1856, **President Franklin Pierce** put up the **first Christmas Tree** in the **White House**.



DURING THE CIVIL WAR

In 1862, **President and Mrs. Lincoln** visited soldiers in Washington, D.C., hospitals on **Christmas Day**.

On December 26, 1864, **Lincoln** gave a **Christmas reception** at the **White House**.

In the uncertain time of the Civil War, **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**, whose wife had just died and whose son was



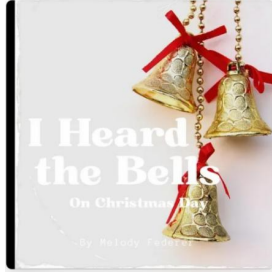
severely wounded in battle, wrote hope-filled poem in 1863: "**I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.**"

In December of 2022, Sight and Sound films released an inspiring film, "[I Heard the Bells](#)," portraying the history behind the poem.

Composer Johnny Marks set the poem to music in

1956, and many famous artists performed renditions, including Bing Crosby, Johnny

Cash, The Carpenters, Harry Belafonte, Casting Crowns, and [Melody Federer](#).



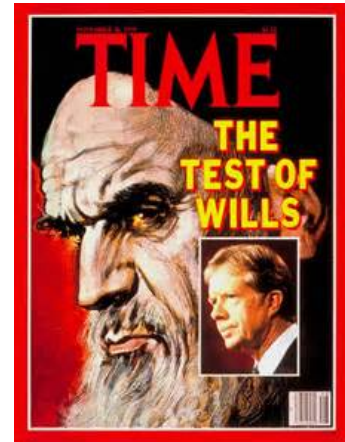
I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day - Single

Melody Federer

HOLIDAY · 2022

▶ Preview

On December 21, 1979, **President Jimmy Carter** stated in a speech seeking U.N. sanctions against Iran for sponsoring terrorism:



"Henry Longfellow wrote a **Christmas carol** in a time of crisis, **the War Between the States**, in 1864.

Two verses of that carol - **'I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day'** - particularly express my thoughts and prayers and, I'm sure, those of our Nation in this time of challenge ... I would like to **quote from that poem**:

'And in despair I bowed my head.
There is no peace on earth, I said.
For hate is strong and mocks the song
of peace on earth, good will to men.



Then pealed the bells,
more loud and deep,
God is not dead,
nor does he sleep.

The wrong shall fail,
the right prevail,

With peace on earth,
good will to men."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow not only wrote popular books and carols, but he was also a **professor at Harvard**, where he taught a student named **Phillips Brooks**.



Phillips Brooks, born December 13, 1835, was the Episcopal bishop of Massachusetts.

While on a **trip to the Holy Land** in 1865, **Phillips Brooks** wrote:



"After an early dinner, we took our horses and rode to Bethlehem ...

It was only about two hours when we came to the town, situated on an eastern ridge of a range of hills, surrounded by its terraced gardens.

... It is a good-looking town, better built than any other we have seen in Palestine ...

Before dark, we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the star.

... It is a fenced piece of ground with a cave in it (all the Holy Places are caves here), in which, strangely enough, they put the shepherds ...

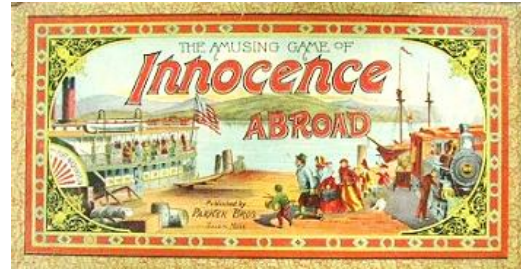
As we passed, the shepherds were still 'keeping watch over their flocks or leading them home to fold.'"

Phillips Brooks returned to Massachusetts in September of 1866 and wrote the carol, "**O Little Town of Bethlehem**":

"O little town of Bethlehem!
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by;

Yet in thy dark streets shineth,
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears
of all the years,
Are met in thee tonight."

In 1867, **Mark Twain** visited
the **Holy Land**, as recorded
in his book, *Innocents
Abroad*, 1869:



"In the **starlight, Galilee** has
no boundaries but the broad compass of the heavens,
and is a theatre meet for great events; meet for **the birth
of a religion able to save the world.**"

FAMOUS NEGRO SPIRITUAL

Another famous **Christmas carol**
is "**Go, Tell It on the Mountain,**"
one of the most popular **Negro
Spirituals.**



It was first **published in 1865,**
**after the Civil War ended
slavery,** in a collection compiled by John Wesley Work,
Jr.

The song was recorded by notable singers, including
Mahalia Jackson, who once stated:

"I sing God's music because it makes me feel free ... It
gives me hope.

With the blues, when you finish, you still have the blues."

**"Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus
Christ is born.**

Go tell it on the Mountain

Negro Spiritual
Mixed Choir

Not too fast and with swing feeling Arthur Starrett

The image shows a musical score for a mixed choir. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The lyrics are: "Go - tell it on the moun - tain, o - ver the hills and ev - ery - where. Go, tell it on the moun - tain, o - ver the hills and ev - ery - where." The second system also has a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The lyrics are: "That Je - sus Christ, is born." The musical notation includes notes, rests, and bar lines.

While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night,
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light.

**Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.**

The shepherds feared and trembled,
When lo! above the earth,
Rang out the angels chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth.

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.

Down in a lowly manger
**The humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn."**

On **Christmas Day, 1868, President Andrew Johnson** proclaimed **full pardon** and amnesty for all who had **participated** in secession or **insurrection**, without reserve or exception.

In addition to the **states**, in 1870, **President Ulysses S.**

Grant signed a Bill making **Christmas Day a National Federal Holiday**.

MORE CLASSIC CAROLS

In 1865, **William Chatterton Dix** wrote the Christmas carol, "**What Child Is This**":

What child is this, who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap, is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping? - Chorus -

This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear for sinners here,
The silent Word is pleading. - Chorus -

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come peasant king to own Him,
The King of kings, salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.

Raise, raise the song on high,
The Virgin sings her lullaby:
Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

In 1885, "**Away in a Manger**" was published in a Lutheran Sunday school book. It was edited in 1892 by Charles H. Gabriel and set to music in 1895 by William J. Kirkpatrick:



Away in a manger,
No crib for His bed
The little Lord Jesus
Laid down His sweet head
The stars in the bright sky
Looked down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing
The poor Baby wakes
But little Lord Jesus
No crying He makes
I love Thee, Lord Jesus
Look down from the sky
And stay by my side,
'Til morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus,
I ask Thee to stay
Close by me forever
And love me I pray
Bless all the dear children
In Thy tender care
And take us to heaven
To live with Thee there."

ELECTRIC LIGHTS

In 1880, **Thomas Edison**,
inventor of the light bulb, strung
electric **Christmas lights** on
his **Menlo Park Laboratory**.

In 1882, **Edward Johnson**,
Edison's partner in the
Edison Illumination
Company, assembled the first
"string" of electric Christmas
tree lights.



As of 1893, **Christmas Day** was recognized as an **official holiday** in every one of the **U.S. States**, and in **all U.S. Territories**.

In 1895, **President Grover Cleveland** placed the **first "electrically- lit" Christmas tree in the White House**.

NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE

In 1923, **President Calvin Coolidge** turned on the **3,000 electric lights** on the **first "National Christmas Tree,"** located outside the White House on the ellipse of the south lawn.

Lighting the **National Christmas Tree**, December 24, 1952, **President Harry S Truman** stated:

"Shepherds, in a field, heard angels singing: '**Glory to God in the highest**, and on earth peace, good will toward men' ...

We turn to the old, old story of how '**God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' ...

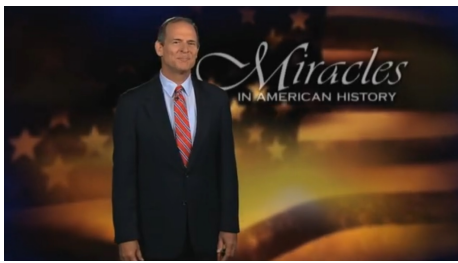
... Let us remember always to try to act ... in the spirit of **the Prince of Peace**.

He bore in His heart no hate and no malice - nothing but love for all mankind. We should ... follow His example ... **Let us also pray for our enemies** ... Through **Jesus Christ** the world will yet be a **better and a fairer place**."

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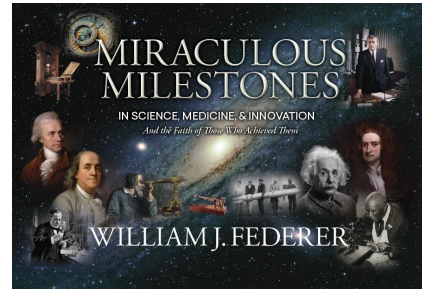
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