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* *Knights of Malta* *

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Chancellor's Update

What If They Never Heard

The celebration of Christmas in the culture in recent years has demonstrated a decline in the appreciation of the real meaning of the holiday. Older generations remember that in earlier times "Merry Christmas!" was joyously expressed not only by practicing Christians, but also by not-so-religious Christians and people of other religious persuasions. Today's Christmas spirit does not emphasize its religious character, but rather consumerism and the impact of spending on gifts to benefit the economy. The figure of importance is probably not the Christ Child, but Santa Claus, who either brings the gifts or influences others to participate in shopping to provide the gifts.

As many influential in the culture continue to diminish the true meaning of Christmas, perhaps the saddest loss is the infrequent presentation of beautiful hymns and carols. Some music has been dropped altogether. Other venues play only orchestral renditions with no choral singing of lyrics. The most recent gimmick occurred at a public school winter concert, where the words of "Silent Night" were altered to eliminate any reference to the holy Child and His virgin mother.

There is an old saying, "He who sings, prays doubly." Also, many teachers believe that their students "learn by repetition". So, the loss of hearing often the words of the Christmas songs and carols can have a detrimental effect on one's personal appreciation of the meaning of Christmas.

In addition to relaying the events of the birth of Christ as described in the Bible, some Christmas songs also report the prophecies about the promised Redeemer and the beliefs about Christ held by Christians. Consider the words of some of the most popular carols.

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" speaks of Christ, the everlasting Lord and the Incarnate Deity. It urges its singers to give glory to the newborn King, and to hail the Sun of Righteousness.

"Joy to the World!" tells its listeners, "The Lord is come: Let earth receive her King."

"Angels We Have Heard on High" encourages its singers to come adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord our newborn King.

"While Shepherds Watched their Flocks" informs the listeners, "Born of David's line, the Savior. ... Christ the Lord."

"While by my Sheep" urges, "Praise we the Lord in Heaven on high!" because "This Child shall redeem us all."

"The First Noel" proclaims, "Born is the King of Israel."

The Austrian carol "Silent Night" declares, "Christ the Saviour is born!" It also identifies Him as Son of God.

"God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" reminds its singers, "Our Saviour was born on Christmas Day, to save us all from Satan's power, when we were gone astray."

"O Come, All Ye Faithful" urges all, "Come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

The French carol, "Carol of the Birds" urges its singers, "Come where the Son of God doth lie; Christ on earth with man doth dwell. Join in the shout "Noel, Noel."

After reminding listeners of the divine night of the dear Saviour's birth, the French carol "O Holy Night" commands them to lowly bend and fall on their knees as they behold their King.

The Italian carol "Tu Scendi Dalle Stelle" speaks of the King of heaven who descended from the stars and addresses Him as the divine Baby.

A Polish carol "Bog sie Rodzi" proclaims that God is born. The refrain concludes with the words from Saint John's Gospel, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

"We Three Kings of Orient Are" sings of "King forever, ceasing never, Over us all to reign."

Handel's oratorio "The Messiah" uses the proclamation by the angels to the shepherds from Luke's Gospel and includes prophecies from the Old Testament.

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God...Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.... And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (Isaiah 40).

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." (Malachi 3).

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel." (Is.7).

"For unto Us a Child is born Unto Us a Son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9).

Thus, if this generation fails to hear the Word of God often enough, to some it will be as if they have never heard it, and to others, it will be something eventually forgotten. Saint John wrote in his Gospel, *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not (John 1: 10).*

This Christmas season let us pray that more people of this generation will come to know Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Redeemer, and Saviour of the world.

Merry Christmas!

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