

# **O COME, LET US ADORE HIM**

## **The Story of Christmas Carols**

*By Mindy Starns Clark*

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### **DEDICATION**

*For my grandmother, Lucille Dickerson, a wonderful lady and one of the brightest lights in my life.      The Playwright*

### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

The human stories behind our all-time favorite Christmas carols are brought to life in this joyful musical. Small, easily-rehearsed vignettes as well as the option of using carolers rather than actors for singing make this show extremely flexible. The stories are fascinating and the carols themselves will warm your heart in this old-fashioned Christmas musical.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**ISAAC:** Isaac Watts as a young man of 18.

**MR. WATTS:** Isaac's father.

**WOMAN:** Narrator, dressed as a Christmas caroler.

**MAN:** Narrator, dressed as a Christmas caroler.

**CAROLERS:** A group of singers, as few as 2 or 3, or as many as a full choir.

**CHARLES:** Charles Wesley, author and preacher.

**JOHN:** John Wesley, Charles' brother.

**GEORGE:** George Whitfield, renowned evangelist.

**FELIX:** Felix Mendelssohn, the great composer. He sports the "eccentric" clothing and messy hair of a genius.

**HELGA:** Felix's maid.

**REV. SEARS:** Edmund Sears, a Unitarian minister.

**MRS. SHELTON:** A properly modest church member.

**MR. BLAIR:** An intellectual church member.

**MR. WEATHERLY:** A working-class church member.

**LONGFELLOW:** Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, well-known author.

**ELIZABETH:** Civil War soldier's wife.

**THOMAS:** A soldier, Elizabeth's husband.

**NATHAN:** A soldier, Thomas' friend.

**GUIDE:** A tour guide, preferably an older woman.

**PHILLIPS:** Bishop Phillips Brooks, minister and author.

**TRAVELERS:** A small group on a tour of the Holy Land.  
(One small speaking part, man or woman)

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**SETTING**

Scene 1: 1692, empty stage in front of closed curtain.

Scene 2: 1739, the office Charles Wesley.

Scene 3: 1753, the office of George Whitfield.

Scene 4: 1840, the music room of Felix Mendelssohn.

Scene 5: 1849, a meeting room in a Unitarian church.

Scene 6: 1864, a three-part set that includes a podium or  
spotlight, a table, and a Civil War hospital room.

Scene 7: 1868, a hilltop outside of Bethlehem.

**PROPS**

Hymn book, Bible, pens, writing paper, stack of papers,  
pencil, broom, knitting supplies, newspaper, watch, hat,  
piece of paper, blanket, pocket watch.

**SCENE 1**

*(AT RISE: ISAAC and MR. WATTS enter, both dressed in their Sunday best as they are heading home from church. Isaac is carrying a small hymn book, his father has a Bible.)*

ISAAC: Father, you're crazy! This is all drive! All of it!

MR. WATTS: But it's all we have, son. We sing these songs in church as a part of worship. How can you call them bad?

ISAAC: The songs in this hymnbook are bad because they are inept. They're stupid. They're, they're just — why, every single song in this hymn book is just dumb.

*(THEY reach CS and stop walking.)*

MR. WATTS: Son, you have a very discerning ear when it comes to literature...much more than most people. These are the songs we sing in church to praise God. What does it matter if they're not Shakespearean sonnets or Homeric epics? They're just songs.

ISAAC: Just songs, Father? Just songs? Shame on you. What did King David have to say about "just songs"? *(MR. WATTS purses his lips in irritation, without responding.)* You have your Bible there. Look up Psalm 96.

MR. WATTS: *(HE looks it up, then reads.)* "O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name...For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised."

ISAAC: "For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised." Shouldn't that praise be as good as it can possibly be? Shouldn't our songs be as lovely and poetic as that Psalm you just read?

MR. WATTS: This is the Bible, Son.

ISAAC: And this is our hymnal, Father. *(HE opens and begins to read.)* "Ye monsters of the bubbling deep, Your Master's praises spout; Up from the sands ye docclings peep, And wag your tails about."

*(HE closes the book with emphasis and meets his FATHER'S eyes with a challenging expression.)*

MR. WATTS: So...it's not exactly Molière.

ISAAC: I was writing poems in kindergarten that were better than this!

MR. WATTS: *(With a slight smile)* You may be right about that.

ISAAC: The whole situation is just...intolerable.

MR. WATTS: Well then, young man, if you find these songs so hard to tolerate, why don't you give us something better to sing?

ISAAC: *(Surprised)* Me?

MR. WATTS: King David himself said, "Sing unto the Lord a new song."

ISAAC: You know what, Father? I think I will! I'll write a new song!

MR. WATTS: Well, I'll be anxious to see what you'll come up with, Son. *(THEY start to exit, then ISAAC pauses.)*

ISAAC: Imagine that, Father. Isaac Watts...hymn writer.

*(ISAAC and MR. WATTS exit SL, as WOMAN enters from SR.)*

WOMAN: Isaac Watts. Does his name sound familiar? It should. Of course, young Isaac was only eighteen years old the day his father threw down that first challenge to write a better hymn. But Isaac did it. By the following Sunday, the young man presented his first song to the congregation, and they loved it. For the next two years, Isaac introduced a new song to his congregation every single week, eventually earning the reputation for being the "Father of the English Hymn." In his lifetime, Isaac Watts wrote the lyrics for hundreds of hymns, and many of them became favorites that we still sing today. Songs like "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," or "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," and this classic, one of the most beloved hymns of all time:

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*(CAROLERS enter and sing the first verse of "Joy to the World." WOMAN steps back to join the group.)*

CAROLERS:

JOY TO THE WORLD! THE LORD IS COME;  
LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING;  
LET EV'RY HEART PREPARE HIM ROOM,  
AND HEAV'N AND NATURE SING,  
AND HEAV'N AND NATURE SING,  
AND HEAV'N AND HEAV'N AND NATURE SING.

*(The WOMAN and MAN step forward from the group.)*

WOMAN: Christmas carols. You've probably been singing them your whole life.

MAN: We all have our favorites. We sing them every year. But have you ever wondered about the origins of some of your favorite carols? Like, who wrote these beautiful songs?

WOMAN: What were their inspirations?

MAN: We're here tonight to celebrate the beauty and joy of some of our favorite Christmas carols, by taking a closer look at how they came to be.

WOMAN: Of course, every story is different. Quite often, a song would be years in the making, starting out as a poem or simply a tune — and later turning into the carols as we know them today.

MAN: Some of our hymn writers penned both words and music, but in most cases, the creation of carols has involved at least two people — sometimes more.

WOMAN: I can think of no greater example of a collaborative effort than the story of this next song.

MAN: Spanning more than a hundred years and involving quite a few different people, this popular carol first started as a poem, written by Charles Wesley. Come with us now as we imagine how it must have been back in 1739, when it all began.

*(Blackout)*

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