

## ***O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL, HEB.1:1-4***

Carols of Christmas #3

◆Intro: *O Come All Ye Faithful* is an english translation of a song written in Latin by the name of *Adeste Fideles*, and published in 1743. The tune we sing today actually bears that latin name. It is the consent of scholarship today that both the latin text and the tune were written by John Wade, (no not the cowboy actor) an Englishman who taught latin, and copied music by hand as an occupation. *O Come All Ye Faithful* is one of the best and universally known Christmas Carols, with a long tradition of being sung as the last song on Christmas eve inviting the worshiper to Christmas morning celebration. It has a vast history in numerous countries and believe it or not, is even credited by the 80's rock band Twisted Sister as the melodic foundation of their hit "We're Not Gonna Take It". As a tribute, they sing it on their Christmas album.

◆It was a strange sensation for me to watch a group of head-banging men, one dressed like an rather insane woman, screaming "Jesus to thee be all glory given." It points to the fact, I think, that these Christmas songs are so ingrained into the culture of Western society that people are able to sing them without even noticing the depth of theology contained in them. After an breakfast concert some years ago, something didn't feel quite right, so I approached the soloist and asked him if he believed the theology he had just sung to us about. His reply was, "Well,... I really just like to sing." It is that theology I want to remind us of today.

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◆ *O Come all Ye Faithful* is replete with doctrine about who Jesus is. Among the titles it gives him are “King of angels”, “Word of the Father”(Jn.1), “God of God and Light of Light”, “Christ(Messiah) the Lord.” You may wonder why this is important. It all points to just who it is we are crediting, and worshiping in this Christmas season, and who it is we turn to in our prayers and why. Is it some ethereal “spirit of Christmas” that we hope to fall upon us? Is it memory of a generous Saint by the name of Nick (an actual person by the way)? Is it the inherent kindness in the heart of mankind that we are so joyful about? I submit to you that the reason Christmas carols just keep on being sung is because down deep they tell the basics of the one true story: God came down, to save people and bring them up. And he did it in a person, his son. Who was this son?

### **◆1. Jesus was no mere prophet.**

◆ Folks from many backgrounds and religions readily admit that the Jewish, man Jesus from Nazareth, has had an undeniable impact on world history. Many call him a great teacher, or prophet worth listening to like other great leaders. Who or what exactly was Jesus?

◆ In the Fourth Century AD this question was being debated. Christianity had finally become a legal religion in the Roman Empire under the reign of Constantine after three hundred years of persecution and slaughter. Still Christianity grew to the point of dominance in the great, pagan Roman Empire. But the eye-

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witnesses of Christ were now gone, and there was a fair share of debate, and heresy floating around the world about who Jesus was. Some taught that he was an angel, or a spirit(not a human at all) that just took on the appearance of a man while interacting among the people of Palestine in the First Century (docetism). Other's claimed he was merely human, but a truly fine prophet and a good man nonetheless(Arianism), worth reading about even! Others supposed he was mythical kind of being, part God and part man, like a centaur is part horse and part man. People wondered, did he have two natures, a God-nature, and a man-nature, or was he a third kind of being altogether (Apollinarianism)? Was he two separate persons, or personalities inside one body: the person of God (or how did he do miracles?), and the human person Jesus, you know, kinda like a Doctor Jeckle/ Mr. Hyde (Nestorian heresy)?

◆In 325AD the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine convened a gathering of Christian leaders from across his empire. This was to be the first of six historic ecumenical councils stretching on through the year 680AD, that would seek to refine into words just what Christianity taught about who Jesus was and did. This particular gathering took place at Nicaea (modern day Turkey), and wrote the Nicene Creed which Christians universally confess to this day. Now here's the connection: interestingly enough, the Christmas Carol *O Come All Ye Faithful* quotes the Nicene Creed of 325!

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◆“God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God,  
begotten, not created, being of one substance with the  
Father”

◆Why is this significant? Let me tell you of an encounter I had with two black women canvassing my neighborhood and inviting me to their church. They were carrying the WatchTower magazine so I knew they were Jehovah’s Witnesses. I said, as I always do, that I would listen to what they had to say, if they in turn would listen to what I had to say about my religion. They said “OK” and I began. I told them I was a Christian and follow Jesus. They said they did too. But, I said, they didn’t believe the same things about this Jesus as I did. I said he is the Son of God. They said they thought so too. I said I mean something else by Son of God than they do. I said I believe Jesus is the eternal God who made the earth, and the stars, and the dirt we were standing on, and them and me too. And that we exist purely by his will. That he was never created like we were but existed eternally and is in fact the same God as Jehovah himself. They were quiet... After a few seconds that seemed pretty long, they said, “Oh no, we don’t believe that!” And with that they decided to go. You see, while a member of that religion says they believe in Christ, they think he was a created human who by being very moral was rewarded with the status of a god, and that you and I can do the same thing by following his example.

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◆A. Listen to me people. We are not here to hear nice lectures on being good people by one of a great many other super teachers, or religious leaders from history. Christians were not fed to lions for entertainment in the Roman arena, or burnt as street lamps along the Apian Way for being one among many religions following a great teacher. Rome recognized all religions as legitimate. You could read any holy book you wanted and sacrifice to any god you liked as long as you also agreed that Caesar was god. But Christians never agreed that everybody was right, or all religions were the same. Christians believe Jesus is the one true God, 100% divine (all others being nothing at all), was born into human history by a virgin named Mary and so is also 100% man. How does the carol put it? Light of lights eternal, lo he abhors not the virgins womb. God born as a man. That's why Rome killed Christians! And that's why this church sings *O Come all Ye Faithful*, because we are in love with God and Jesus is him. Our texts puts it...

◆“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of all of God’s being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Heb.1:3

◆B. Christians believe Jesus is the Creator-God. As the carol says, “Son of the Father, begotten, not created.” This is far more than a nice teacher. “Exact representation” is the

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greek term "character". It means "imprint" like Washington's head stamped on a quarter.

◆C. Furthermore Christians believe Jesus is the Son, not an angel or a celestial being. He's superior to angels (v4).

"Come and behold him, born the King of Angels". He is superior to ancient angelic appearances, and the many and various ways God spoke into the world: visions to Abraham, angelic visitors to Abraham; dreams to Jacob; dreams to Joseph; visions to Daniel. The text is interesting here.

Literally it goes like this: "in this end of days (think final) he has spoken to us in son." Not "the son", or "his son", both of which are assumed. But "son". "The focus here is on the nature of the vehicle of God's revelation: He is no mere spokesman (or prophet) for God, nor is he merely a heavenly messenger (or angel); instead, this final revelation comes through one who is intimately acquainted with the heavenly Father in a way that only a family member could be." -NET Bible notes. The final and highest revelation of God is "son". In fact what follows is seven descriptions of the Son.

◆The Apostle Paul preached the exact same thing:

◆*"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created*

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*by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:15-17, NIV.*

◆ Now, why can't Christians play nice with others and just agree that nothing is really true and everybody is right. Because that's not what Jesus said. We just believe what Jesus claimed about himself:

◆ *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.” Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”” John 10:27-33, NIV.*

◆ “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ...For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” At this the Jews began to grumble...They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”” John 6:38-42, NIV.

◆ “I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” At this the Jews exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?” ...[Jesus answered] Your father Abraham

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rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

“You are not yet fifty years old,” the Jews said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”” John 8:51-58, NIV.

◆ Perhaps CS Lewis said it best in his profound little book *Mere Christianity*:

◆ “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

◆ **2. Jesus is no mere example.**

◆ Let us keep this at the forefront of our hearts; We do not love Jesus, or worship him as God because he was a really good man and achieved perfection, or Nirvana, and showed us it could be done. No. Christians love and worship Jesus as God because he, as our text puts it, “provided purification for sins.” Jesus did not show us how to do it! He did it. He paid our fines. He is our

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redemption. He bought our lives. His death was our death to sin and our door to eternity.

◆*"the Father, ... has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Colossians 1:12-14, NIV.*

◆Do not hope to do something worthy before you die. Do not worry that you haven't been worthy before you die. You haven't. You cannot. You are twisted, sister, and broken, brother. Rather, "O come let us adore him." For he adored us in spite of our sinfulness. Jesus blood is worth more than the blood of every creature the ever lived combined. A price cannot be put on him for we cannot conceive us such a number. But our sins were put on him and all we must do is put our faith in him; in other words, adore him. When you get up in the morning, adore Christ the Lord. When you go to work, go to work to adore Christ the Lord. When you give to another, give as unto Christ the Lord. Each one who adores Christ the Lord is rescued, and in the kingdom!

◆*"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--"*  
*Colossians 1:21, 22, NIV.*

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◆**Conclusion:** So far I haven't told you anything new. Jesus is God, not mere teacher. Jesus is savior, not mere inspiration. Christians have been rejoicing in this for two millennia!

Manhattan, New York, pastor Tim Keller once said that in 1970 a Sunday school teacher changed his life with a simple illustration. The teacher said, "Let's assume the distance between the earth and the sun (92 million miles) was reduced to the thickness of this sheet of paper. If that is the case, then the distance between the earth and the nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high. And the diameter of the galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high." Then Keller's teacher added, "The galaxy is just a speck of dust in the universe, yet Jesus holds the universe together by the word of his power." Finally, the teacher asked her students, "Now, is this the kind of person you ask into your life to be your assistant?" O Come Let Us Adore him.