

O Come, All Ye Faithful

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

John Francis Wade, author of this hymn, was hounded out of England in 1745. He was a Roman Catholic layman in Lancashire; but because of persecution arising from the Jacobite rebellion, streams of Catholics fled to France and Portugal, where communities of English-Speaking Catholics appeared.

But how could he, a refugee, support himself? In those days, the printing of musical scores was cumbersome, and copying them by hand was an art. In the famous Roman Catholic College and Ministry Center in Douay, France, Wade taught music and became renowned as a copyist of musical scores. His work was exquisite.

In 1743, Wade, 32, had produced a copy of a Latin Christmas carol beginning with the phrase *Adeste Fidelis, Laeti triumphantes*. At one time historians believed he had simply discovered an ancient hymn by an unknown author, but most scholars now believe Wade himself composed the lyrics. Seven original hand-copied manuscripts of this Latin hymn have been found, all of them bearing Wade's signature.

John Wade passed away on August 16, 1786, at age 75. His obituary honored him for his "beautiful manuscripts" that adorned chapels and homes.

As time passed, English Catholics began returning to Britain, and they carried Wade's Christmas carol with them. More time passed, and one day an Anglican minister named Rev. Frederick Oakeley, who preached at Margaret Street Chapel in London, came across Wade's Latin Christmas carol. Being deeply moved, he translated it into English for Margaret Street Chapel. The first line of Oakeley's translation said: "Ye Faithful, Approach Ye."

Somehow, "Ye Faithful, Approach Ye," didn't catch on and several years later Oakeley tried again. By this time, Oakeley, too, was a Roman Catholic priest, having converted to Catholicism in 1845. Perhaps his grasp of Latin had improved, because as he repeated over and over the Latin phrase *Adeste Fidelis, Laeti triumphantes* he finally came up with the simpler, more vigorous *O Come, All Ye Faithful, Joyful and Triumphant!*

So two brave Englishmen, Catholics, lovers of Christmas and lovers of hymns, living a hundred years apart, writing in two different nations, combined their talents to bid us come, joyful and triumphant, and adore Him born the King of angels.

O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord

Excerpt from: Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul*, page 57