

O Come All Ye Faithful¹

John Wade, a 32 y.o. Roman Catholic Lancastrian, probably wrote the first four stanzas (1740-4), Abbé Étienne Jean François Borderies (1822) added three more, and someone added an eighth sometime before 1886. Wade was a fervent Roman Catholic, who moved from Lancaster to escape religious persecution, when commitment to Rome was still feared to endanger English monarchy. In Continental Europe, he acted as a scribe and taught church music. Over a millennium earlier, it is said that Pope Gregory the Great had seen some angel-faced English slave children. Told that they were Angles/English, he responded, “*Non Angli sed Angeli*” (not Angles, but Angels). This encounter inspired his Romanisation of Angland/England, which he begun through monks in 597. They were led by Augustine [of Canterbury], later to become the first archbishop of Canterbury. Augustine’s mission was to suffer the setback of repaganisation. After King Henry 8, when Rome thought Anglicanism pagan, there is some reason to think that Wade’s song, its Latin title *Adeste Fideles*, at least doubled as a coded signal for re-Romanisation of the English Angles. Truth be told, there were true Christians in Rome and in Canterbury, and both sides shed blood for religious freedom.

Fideles could have meant *faithful* Roman Catholic Jacobites. *Bethlehem* might have been a code for *Britain*. *Angeli* had long had the word-play with *angli* (English). In effect, faithful Romanists should rally behind Bonnie Prince Charlie, born to be the king of Angles, and the exiled return to Britain. However, whatever code, if any, is written into a song, its face value can often conceal a hidden value. Simon & Garfunkel’s *Bridge Over Trouble Water*, probably referred to Peggy Harper, Simon’s wife, having discovered her first silver hair (or had “sail on, silver girl,” a drug connection?), but how many have enjoyed the silver sail, riding the wind of hope through the storm of life? Likewise, whatever Anglicans might think about re-Romanisation, they are happy to sing of the faithful arriving in Bethlehem to join the *angeli*. Let us not be too quick to assume hidden meanings. Even Freud, though hating his father and lusting for his mother—yet wishing to think he was normal by abnormalising all others—acknowledged that a banana can be simply a banana. And to accuse the Roman Bath attendant of arson, simply because, when a user had complained hours earlier about it being too cold, he had replied that it would soon be “hot enough,” was taking an unintended truth too far (see C S Lewis’ *Reflections on the Psalms: Second Meanings*). Besides, while Wade might have doodled sketches of the prince alongside the lyrics, would he have called any mortal *Jesus*, or attributed incarnate birth to another? A later Roman Catholic, J R R Tolkien, cautioned that applicability need not mean intentionality.

Translating into English has been done many times. Rev. Frederick Oakeley, who later switched from Canterbury to Rome, translated Wade, and William T Brooke, who moved from the Baptist movement to Canterbury, translated Abbé Borderies and the untraced stanza, sandwiching them within *Adeste Fideles*. For simplicity, I have

¹ www.hymnary.org/text/o_come_all_ye_faithful_joyful_and_triumph

discounted the additions by Abbé Étienne Jean François Borderies. They invite us to prioritise meeting Jesus, in line with the shepherds, to tell Jesus the saviour (in his infancy!) of our love, and to muse over the incarnation. I have also discounted the untraced addition which contrasts the magi's gift to our hearts' gift. While I look to retain Wade's Nicene terms, his use of *begotten* I discount. Let's briefly look at this.

Talk about God's son being *begotten* can mislead. Theologians speak rather of God's son *per se* being eternally generated, and Jesus as born within time. In short, Jesus is the permanent time (temporal) mode of the uncreated second person of the eternal tripersonal society. Yep, that came from me. Was *begotten* brought in as a reaction to some early controversies? Against Arius, orthodoxy said that God's son was more like what one *births*, rather than what they *make*. Against Valentinus, that only *one* was birthed/*emanated* (within eternity), not multitudes. When asked to produce the definitive Latin Bible translation, perhaps Jerome felt he should introduce the stronger idea of 'only begotten' into the text, which many translations have kept. As Philip Comfort put it, "*only begotten*' probably originated from Jerome's Latin translation [the Vulgate] when Jerome changed *unicus* (unique) to *unigenitus* (only begotten). Prior to Jerome's translation, the old Latin Codex Vercellensis (AD 365) had translated *monogenous*, as *unicus*" (Complete Guide To Bible Versions, 1991:128). Sure, we may ask whether Vulgate corrected Vercellensis, but in Heb.11:17 *only begotten/born*, or *one and only*, does not fit, since Abraham had had another son, Ishmael: *special/unique/beloved son* was meant. For Jhn.1:18, something like *the one-of-a-kind [son], himself God*, for the matrix of deity and humanity, is perhaps the better translation. My college's notes BS01 (John's Gospel) cover this more.

From: *O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! / O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem! / Come and behold him, born the King of angels.*

God of God, Light of Light eternal, / Io, he abhors not the virgin's womb / Son of the Father, begotten, not created.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, / sing, all ye citizens of heaven above / "Glory to God, all glory in the highest!"

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be all glory given / Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.

O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

To: *O come all you faithful, joyful and triumphant / O come now remember humble Bethlehem / Come and behold Christ, born the king of angels.*

God from God and, light from light / but was incarnated to face the gloom / Truly himself God, he was not created.

Sang choirs of angels, sang in celebration / sang all the citizens of heaven above / glory to God, in the highest.

Happy we praise him, born a new age dawning / Jesus, to him be sovereign glory given / Word of the father, he's the Second Adam.

O come, let us adore him x 3 / Christ the lord

(venite adoremus Dominum!)