

O Come, All Ye Faithful 253

John Francis Wade, ca. 1743
 trans. Frederick Oakeley, 1841

ADESTE FIDELES

John Francis Wade, ca. 1743
 harm. *The English Hymnal*, 1906

1. O come, all ye faith-ful, joy-ful and tri-um-phant, O come ye,
 2. God of God, Light of Light, lo, He
 3. Sing, choirs of an-gels; sing in ex-ul-ta-tion; sing, all
 4. Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this hap-py morn-ing; Je-sus,

O come ye to Beth-le-hem! Come, and be-hold Him,
 ab-hors not the vir-gin's womb; ver-y God, be-
 ye cit-i-zens of heav'n a-bove! Glo-ry to God, all
 to Thee be all glo-ry giv'n! Word of the Fa-ther,

born the King of an-gels!
 got-ten, not cre-a-ted; O come, let us a-dore Him; O come, let us
 glo-ry in the high-est!
 now in flesh ap-pear-ing!

a-dore Him; O come, let us a-dore Him, Christ, the Lord!

O Come All Ye Faithful is a classic hymn for Advent and Christmas, full of recognizable beauty and wonder. It is also a surprisingly odd hymn.

For starters, each verse has a different audience. Verse one addresses the “faithful,” the implied “we” in the refrain, “*O come let us adore Him.*” The often omitted verse two is a reference to Christ’s description in the Nicene Creed: “*very God, begotten not created.*” Verse three is directed to the choir of angels above the shepherds in the second chapter of Luke’s gospel. Finally, verse four has the speaker singing to Jesus himself. Assumed connections can certainly be made, but the author leaves us without explanation.

Speaking of the author, the history behind the hymn is also a bit strange. The lyrics are usually attributed to John Francis Wade, who first published the hymn in Latin in the 1700s. Wade was an English Catholic living in exile in France because of persecution from the Church of England. Some musicologists and historians debate whether or not Wade is the true author. A few others think Wade intended the hymn as a anthem written in coded language aimed at getting a Scottish Catholic King on the throne back in England! But its most likely history is simply that Wade found great encouragement in ancient Latin texts while teaching music and decided to adapt his own.

Regardless of its background, Wade’s *Adeste Fideles* has stood the test of time and become a staple of Christian worship during Advent and Christmas. Though disjointed in perspective, all of the verses show clear reference to Scripture and fold nicely into a refrain of worship to Jesus Christ. They even form a kind of doxological liturgy from verse to verse: a call to worship, a confession of faith, a charge to the heavenly host, and a final address to the King Himself. These timeless lyrics draw distracted hearts towards one singular goal of worship, as the church proclaims, “*O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*”

Scripture to consider:

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|----------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Psalm 45 | Luke 2:1-20 | Hebrews 1 |
| Psalm 47 | John 1:1-18 | Revelation 5 |
| Matthew 2:1-12 | Colossians 1:15-23 | |

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