

# Joy to the World!



*And heaven and nature sing!*

## At Christmas, we sing.

Enter a shop anytime from November onwards and Christmas music will be playing. We speak of Christmas carols, but there's a distinction between Christmas music that is about the nativity (e.g., *Silent Night*) and that which is about the festive season, especially in a winter climate, without any reference to the nativity (e.g., *Jingle Bells*). And of the hymns about the nativity, there are those that have a hauntingly beautiful lullaby feel about them, like *Silent Night*, and those that raise the roof when we sing them because our hearts are bursting with joy, such as *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*.

When we attend Christmas Mass, a festival of lessons and carols, or whatever Christmas liturgy we choose, we hope to hear some of our favourite Christmas music played. And of all liturgical seasons, at Christmas, we really sing!!!! It's as though we want to join the angels who announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds in their fields, because the nativity is such a joyful moment in salvation history. Jesus, Son of God, has become human and chosen to dwell among us! Why wouldn't we want to sing!

Christmas hymns, like many other hymns, vary in how accurately their words reflect the content of the two gospels that have a narrative about the nativity – Luke and Matthew. This is true of Christmas art too – we often see a somewhat cluttered stable with animals, shepherds, and the wise men, with the Holy Family huddled in the middle of it all! But we don't seem to mind, because in their own way, both the hymns and art are striving to capture the mystery and wonder of the incarnation.



**To ponder:** What's your favourite Christmas hymn? What do you think makes it so special for you? The music? The lyrics? A moment in your own life it reminds you of? Something else? Look up the lyrics of your favourite hymn and reflect on what they reveal to you about the wonder and joy of the birth of Jesus. Like reading the scriptures, where sometimes words suddenly strike us that we've never noticed before, this can happen with Christmas hymns too. Is there a word, line, phrase, or paragraph that grabs your attention in a way it hasn't before? What's important about this now?

Once in Royal David's city  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little Child.

Jesus, to Thee be glory given  
Word of the Father  
Now in flesh appearing  
O come, let us adore Him  
Christ the Lord!

Silent Night! Holy night!  
Shepherds quake at the sight,  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia;  
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Angels we have heard on high  
Sweetly singing o'er the plains  
And the mountains in reply  
Echoing their joyous strains  
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!