

Caroling Part Of Christmas

Just as the use of candles has become the practice of almost every home at Christmas time, Christmas caroling is a part of the Christmas programs of practically all churches. Indeed Christmas caroling is almost as old as Christmas itself, though not in the form we know it. Christmas hymns go back to the Fifth Century, when most of them were written in Latin. Among the outstanding composers of Christmas carols were: Joseph Mohr, an Austrian, who composed "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve, 1818; Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley, wrote "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" in 1789. Phillips Brooks, a noted Boston minister, wrote, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" in 1866. "Joy to the World", was written by Isaac Watts in the 18th century. The "Messiah" oratorio was composed by George Friderick Handel in only 25 days. It was first performed in 1749 in Dublin, Ireland. A year later King George II set the custom of standing during the Oratorio's "Hallelujah Chorus".

As has been the custom throughout the world down through the centuries, the children and young people of practically all the churches in Yancey County will go caroling to celebrate Christmas, and candles will glow in windows and homes to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

The Legend of the Christmas Candle

Long ago, in Austria, there lived an old shoemaker in a little cottage on the edge of a village. Although this humble man had very little, for himself or to share with others, his goodness of heart was such that each evening he placed in his window a lighted candle as a sign of welcome to weary travelers who might be seeking shelter.

War came to the village and famine, yet the little light never wavered. Each night it took its place to send forth its beam as a message of cheer to forlorn wayfarers.

Great hardships came. Sons died in battle. Crops failed. Animals starved for want of grain. Yet always, somehow, the old shoemaker suffered less than the others. It was almost as though there was a special charm upon him, until at last the peasants gathered together and said: "Surely there is something different about him that he is spared — what does he do that we do not do? Perhaps it is his little candle — Let us, too, place lights in our windows."

It was wintertime and the suffering was acute. Only the old men were left in the village, for the war was still raging.

Now it happened that the day the peasants took counsel was the day before Christmas and the first night that candles were set to burn in all the windows was Christmas Eve.

And when the next morning came it was as though a miracle had occurred. There was a soft mantle of snow over the village like a gentle blessing, but there was something more—a new air of peace and hope—and before the sun had done more than cast its first bright gleams on the spire of the village church there came a messenger riding to bring the great, glad news that Peace had come.

The church bells chimed and the people knelt in prayer and there was a feeling of Christmas glory such as there had not been in many years.

The peasants were awed: "It was the candles," they whispered; "They have guided the Christ Child to our doorsteps. We must never again fail to light our candles on His Birthday."

From such a long-ago beginning this beautiful custom has now spread over the world. On Christmas Eve millions of lights flicker in millions of windows sending out the message of hope and cheer that never grows old.

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