

# We Three Kings

Words & Music by John Henry Hopkins, Jr., 1820-1891

Sing along with Clamavi De Profundus @ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDqTL49OwDA&list=RDHDqTL49OwDA&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDqTL49OwDA&list=RDHDqTL49OwDA&start_radio=1)

Key ~ D<sup>m</sup> & F with a  
transpose to G<sup>#m</sup> & B,  
another to C<sup>#m</sup> & E,  
another to D<sup>#m</sup> & F<sup>#</sup>  
Tempo ~ 58bpm  
Time ~ 3/4

D<sup>m</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>m</sup>  
We three kings of Orient are,  
D<sup>m</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>m</sup>  
Bearing gifts we traverse afar.  
D<sup>m</sup> C F  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,  
G<sup>m</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>m</sup>  
Following yonder star.

CHORUS  
C C<sup>7</sup> F B<sup>b</sup> F  
O - O star of wonder, star of night,  
F B<sup>b</sup> F  
Star with royal beauty bright.  
D<sup>m</sup> C F B<sup>b</sup> C F  
Westward leading, still proceeding;  
F B<sup>b</sup> F  
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Caspar  
D<sup>m</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>m</sup>  
Born a King on Bethlehem's plain;  
D<sup>m</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>m</sup>  
Gold I bring to crown Him again.  
D<sup>m</sup> C F  
King forever, ceasing never,  
G<sup>m</sup> A<sup>7</sup> D<sup>m</sup>  
Over us all to reign.

CHORUS

Melchior  
G<sup>#m</sup> C<sup>#m7/G#</sup> G<sup>#m</sup>  
Frankincense to offer have I,  
G<sup>#m</sup> C<sup>#m7/G#</sup> G<sup>#m</sup>  
Incense owns a Deity nigh,  
G<sup>#m</sup> F<sup>#</sup> B  
Prayer and praising, all men raising,  
G<sup>#m</sup> C<sup>#m7/G#</sup> G<sup>#m</sup>  
Worship Him, God on high.

CHORUS  
F<sup>#</sup> F<sup>#7</sup> B E/B B  
O - O star of wonder, star of night,  
B E/B B  
Star with royal beauty bright.  
G<sup>#m</sup> F<sup>#</sup> B E/B F<sup>#</sup> B  
Westward leading, still proceeding;  
B E/B B  
Guide us to thy perfect light.

## Balthazar

C<sup>#m</sup>/G# G<sup>#7</sup> C<sup>#m</sup>/G#  
Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume,  
C<sup>#m</sup>/G# G<sup>#7</sup> C<sup>#m</sup>/G#  
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
C<sup>#m</sup>/G# B E  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,  
C<sup>#m</sup>/G# G<sup>#7</sup> C<sup>#m</sup>/G#  
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

CHORUS  
B B<sup>7</sup>/F# E A E  
O - O star of wonder, star of night,  
E A E  
Star with royal beauty bright.  
C<sup>#m</sup>/G# E B E A B E  
West - ward leading, still proceeding;  
E A E  
Guide us to thy perfect light.

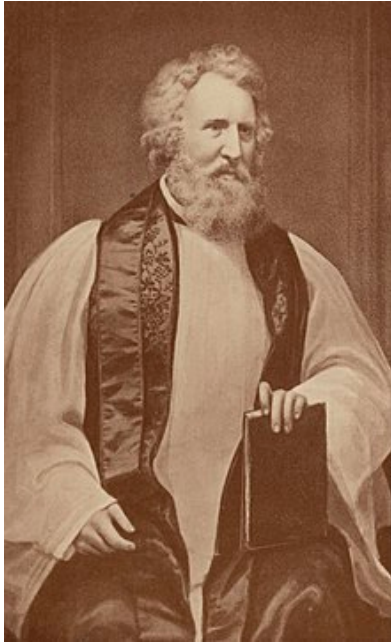
All  
D<sup>#m</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> D<sup>#m</sup>  
Glorious now behold Him arise,  
D<sup>#m</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> D<sup>#m</sup>  
King and God and sacrifice;  
D<sup>#m</sup> C<sup>#</sup> F<sup>#</sup>  
Alle-lu - ia, al - le - luia;  
D<sup>#m</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> D<sup>#m</sup>  
Sounds through the earth and skies.

CHORUS  
C<sup>#</sup> C<sup>#7</sup> F<sup>#</sup> B F<sup>#</sup>  
O - O star of wonder, star of night,  
F<sup>#</sup> B F<sup>#</sup>  
Star with royal beauty bright.  
D<sup>#m</sup> F<sup>#</sup> C<sup>#</sup> F<sup>#</sup> B C<sup>#</sup> F<sup>#</sup>  
Westward lea- ding, still proceeding;  
F<sup>#</sup> B F<sup>#</sup>  
Guide us to thy perfect light.

TAG  
F<sup>#</sup> B F<sup>#</sup>  
Star of wonder, star so bright.

# History

John Henry Hopkins, Jr. (Pittsburgh-born 1820-1891) wrote both words and music for “**We Three Kings**” in 1857 while he was working as editor of the *Church Journal* in New York City. He was a versatile fellow. In addition to being an editor he was a clergyman, author, journalist, book illustrator, designer of stained glass windows and other ecclesiastical objects.



John Henry Hopkins, Jr.  
Image from Wikipedia

It was all the fault of the gold, frankincense, and myrrh. From that brief mention of the gifts presented by the Wise Men to the child Jesus, as related in Matthew 2: 11, evolved a very persistent and pervasive bit of religious folklore. The fine and expensive gifts, in the logic of the myth, meant that the visitors had to be of very high station, such as kings. The same logic pattern determined that the three types of offering had to correspond with the number of persons involved. Accordingly the erroneous but basically harmless illusion of “the Three Kings” has become a deeply embedded imperfection of our annual observance of Christmas.

The strong perpetuation of the myth by “We Three Kings of Orient Are,” the best-known carol on the theme of the Wise Men, has done absolutely nothing to help the situation. Hopkins probably did not at all reflect on the theological implications of his little song. His only apparent purpose was to devise a special Christmas present for his beloved nephews and nieces. Annually, Hopkins made a holiday trip to the Burlington area of Vermont, which was the home of his father John Henry Hopkins, Sr., (1792-1868), the long-time Episcopal bishop of that state. As usual, bachelor Uncle Henry did not disappoint the children, for the dramatization of the story from Matthew (included in his carol) was reportedly a big hit in the Hopkins household. The success of “We Three Kings” within the author’s family circle was soon replicated in the outside world. As early as 1859, the song may have been put into print and then went through a flurry of reprinting in rapid sequence that no doubt reflected the quickly spreading fame of Hopkins’ carol, which ultimately became one of the most famous of all Christmas pieces.

In spite of the unbiblical aspects of Hopkins’ lyrics, and some negative criticism and even exclusion from hymnals because of the inaccuracies, “We Three Kings” is a perennial favorite as the story speaks of an event where human beings gave gifts to the Christ - perhaps the only time in human history where the direction of gift giving was man to God. But why Hopkin’s carol is such a favorite is a bit of a puzzle. The lyrics are clearly inferior. The melody is, fortunately, far more esthetic. The cadence of the music captures a camel’s gait.

*William E. Studwell; Frank Hoffmann, B Lee Cooper, (2012-10-12). The Christmas Carol Reader (Haworth Popular Culture) (pp. 76-78). Taylor and Francis; Kindle Edition and Rick*