

Good Christian Men Rejoice

Poem by Heinrich Suso in the mid-1300s, translation & scoring by John Mason Neale in 1853

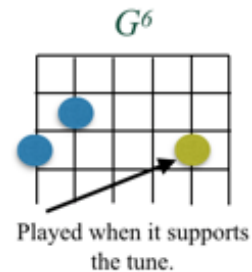
G⁷ C G⁷ C F C G⁷ C F C
Good Christian men, re- jo- o- oice with heart and soul and vo- o- oice.

C G⁷ E A^m
Give ye heed to what we say. News! News!

D^m G⁶ C
Jesus Christ is born today.

C G⁷ E A^m D^m G⁶ C
Ox and ass before Him bow and He is in the manger now.

F G⁷ C G⁶ C
Christ is born today! Christ is born today.



G⁷ C G⁷ C F C G⁷ C F C
Good Christian men, re- jo- o- oice with heart and soul and vo- o- oice.

C G⁷ E A^m
Now ye hear of endless bliss. Joy! Joy!

D^m G⁶ C
Jesus Christ was born for this.

C G⁷ E A^m D^m G⁶ C
He had opened the heavenly door and man is blessed evermore.

F G⁷ C G⁶ C
Christ was born for this. Christ was born for this.

G⁷ C G⁷ C F C G⁷ C F C
Good Christian men, re- jo- o- oice with heart and soul and vo- o- oice.

C G⁷ E A^m
Now ye need not fear the grave. Peace! Peace!

D^m G⁶ C
Jesus Christ was born to save.

C G⁷ E A^m D^m G⁶ C
Calls you one and calls you all to gain his everlasting hall.

F G⁷ C G⁶ C
Christ was born to save. Christ was born to save.

Christmas as you go

History

“Good Christian Men Rejoice” was written and scored by two men, who were persecuted for their religious convictions, endured great personal hardships, suffered through lingering illness, and died in relative obscurity.



Heinrich Suso

Image from spreadjesus.org

Heinrich Suso was a son of wealth and privilege, which he left to become a Dominican monk. He wrote the “Little Book of Truth” in 1326 that advocated that the church should open the gospel to the folks in a way that would bring hope, compassion, and understanding. As a result, he was tried for heresy.

He continued on, writing a follow up “Little Book of Eternal Wisdom” in which he laid out God’s message of salvation (the Christ) in common language. For this the Pope condemned him in 1329 and the German king exiled him (exile was a great humiliation for those of high birth in those times). He fled to Switzerland.

Suso was persecuted, slandered, and threatened with death. He vividly saw and heard “Good Christian Men Rejoice” during this time, and upon awaking, wrote it down. It was radically different from hymns of the day – vibrant, in common language vs the solemn, monophonic Latin songs or the church. The folk enthusiastically took it up. Martin Luther found inspiration in this carol.

James (John) Mason Neale was impressed as well. The mid-1800s was another time in which exuberant faith was viewed as radical. Neale was exiled, beaten and even stoned once for his views on how best to share the gospel. In 1854 Neale co-founded the Society of Saint Margaret, an order of women in the Church of England dedicated to nursing the sick. Many Anglicans in his day, however, were very suspicious of anything suggestive of Roman Catholicism.

He was also the principal founder of the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association, a religious organization founded as the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Churches Union in 1864.

Neale was strongly high church in his sympathies, and had to endure a good deal of opposition, including a fourteen years' inhibition by his bishop. He translated the Eastern liturgies into English, and wrote a mystical and devotional commentary on the Psalms.

However, he is best known as a hymn writer and, especially, translator, having enriched English hymnody with many ancient and mediaeval hymns translated from Latin and Greek. More than anyone else, he made English-speaking congregations aware of the centuries-old tradition of Latin, Greek, Russian, and Syrian hymns. “The English Hymnal” (1906) contains 63 of his translated hymns and six original hymns by Neale

“Good Christian Men Rejoice” was one of those translations that appeared in 1853 in “Carols of Christmastide”. It’s rarely produced today in large choirs or in the best concert halls. This would no doubt please Suso and Neale as they spent much of their time and energy directed toward the least of these.

James E Kiefer at <http://justus.anglican.org>. Wikipedia



John Mason Neale

Image from hymnary.org