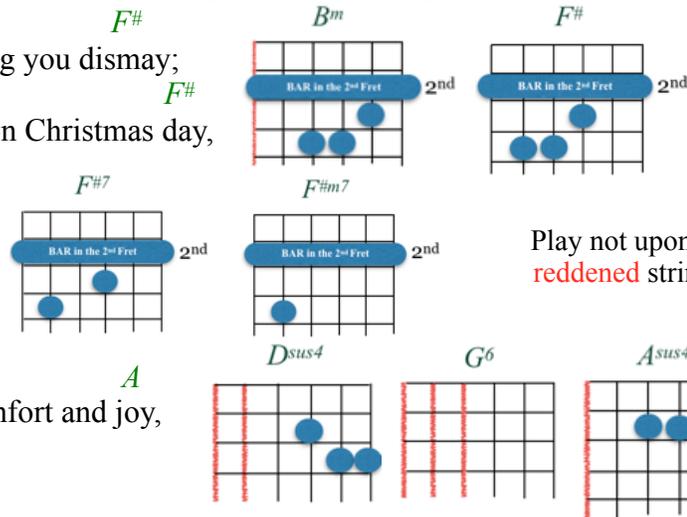


God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

Words are based on Matthew by an unknown author using a traditional English melody

A B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay;
B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 Remember Christ, our savior, was born on Christmas day,
E^m A D F^{#m}
 To save us all from Satan's power,
F^{#7} B^m A
 When we were gone astray,



Play not upon the reddened strings.

REFRAIN

A⁷ D Dsus4 D B^m G⁶ Asus4 F^{#7} B^m A
 O ti-dings of com- - - fort and joy, comfort and joy,
A⁷ D Dsus4 A E^m F^{#7} B^m
 O t - i - - dings of comfort and joy.

A B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 From God our heavenly Father, the blessed angels came;
B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 Unto some certain shepherds, with tidings of the same,
E^m A D F^{#m}
 That there was born in Bethlehem,
F^{#7} B^m A
 The Son of God by name,

REFRAIN

A B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 The shepherds at those tidings, re-joiced much in mind;
B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 And left their flocks a feeding, in tempest, storm and wind,
E^m A D F^{#m}
 And went to Bethlehem straight-way,
F^{#7} B^m A
 This blessed babe to find,

REFRAIN

A B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 But when to Bethle - hem they came, where at this infant lay;
B^m E^m B^m A G F[#]
 They found Him in a manger, where oxen feed on hay,
E^m A D F^{#m}
 His Mother Mary kneeling,
F^{#7} B^m A
 Un - to the Lord did pray,

REFRAIN

Christmas as you go

History

Because of how wonderfully it told the Christmas story, “**God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen**” (first penned in the 1500s) earned a prominent spot in Dickens’s classic 1843 novel, *A Christmas Carol*: “...at the first sound of — ‘God bless you merry, gentlemen! May nothing you dismay!’— Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost.”

Like so many early Christmas songs, this carol was written as a direct reaction to the music of the 15th Century Church. During this period, the songs of organized religion were usually written in Latin and their melodies were somber and dark, offering singers and listeners little inspiration or joy. In fact, though few admitted it in public, most church members secretly disliked the accepted religious songs of the day. Yet the laymen of the time had no power over the way they worshipped and had to accept things as they were. So, while they continued to go to worship, they created their own church music outside the walls of the cathedrals and chapels. In this way, the peasant class led a quiet rebellion against the tone of religious music by writing religious folks songs that were light, lively and penned in common language. Their Christmas



Christmas Carol Singers by an unknown artist
Image from [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/14911170@N00/10000000000/)

folk songs became the foundation of what are now known as Christmas carols.

“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” was the most famous and most loved of all the early carols. Written with an upbeat melody and speaking of the birth of Jesus in joyful terms, the song may have shocked early church leaders, but it charmed their flocks. Not only did they sing to this carol, they danced to it.

The way we generally understand “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” today is not anything like what the English peasants meant when they first sang this song more than 500 years ago.

When modern people say “Merry” Christmas, the word merry means happy. When “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” was written, merry had a very different meaning. Robin Hood’s “Merry Men” might have been happy, but the merry that described them meant great and mighty. Thus, in the Middle Ages, a strong army was a merry army, a great singer was a merry singer, and a mighty ruler was a merry ruler.

The word rest in “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” simply means keep or make. A comma needs to be placed after the word “merry.” In modern English, the first line of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” should read “God make you mighty, gentlemen.” Using this translation, the old carol suddenly makes perfect sense, as does the most common saying of the holidays, “Merry Christmas.”

From “*The Stories Behind The Best-Loved Songs of Christmas*” by Ace Collins, September 27, 2001