



When did you hear your first Christmas song during the last weeks? I know some radio stations begin playing Christmas music wall to wall around Thanksgiving Day. When did you hear first: the ringing of a salvation army worker or a song on the radio? I know there are some people who quickly get tired of the endless Christmas songs they hear in the malls as they shop, but I love Christmas music. I suppose that is because I love Christmas. What does surprise me a bit that is after today, December 25<sup>th</sup>, you may not hear another carol until next year. This bothers me a bit because Christmas is not just one day, but it a season that extends until the feast of the Epiphany, or as some call it, little Christmas. The Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, reminds us that celebrating the birth of Christ is not just a one-day event. God did not bless me with much of a singing voice, but I can belt out *Five Calling Rings*.

I googled the five most popular songs and this is what came up. I am sure there would be many debates about this since most of these lists are rather casually drawn up. In order, they were: *The Christmas Song* by Nat King Cole, *White Christmas* by Bing Crosby, *Happy Xmas* by John Lennon, *Rocking Around the Christmas Tree* by Brenda Lee, and *Santa Claus is coming to town* by Bruce Springsteen and Bon Jovi. Who could not like the beautiful voice of Nat King Cole even though I do have much of a taste for chestnut, roasted or not. I like Bing Crosby but I am not big on a *white Christmas* since we would lose much of our congregation, and dare I say as a pastor, much of our collection. *Rocking around the Christmas Tree* is a fun song for a party. Although I wish John Lennon would have used the word *Christmas* rather than *XMass*, I do appreciate his desire for a world at peace and an end to war as all of us do. I like Bruce Springsteen's music and I Santa Claus is a good friend of mine. Some dare to say that we are similar in size. I am glad that *Grandma Got Run over by a Reindeer* did not make the top

five Christmas songs. Perhaps, you noticed that of the five songs listed, none of them are hymns or carols. You have to google Christmas hymns to get at those songs that many of us also love very much.

Rather than mention the five most popular Christmas carols on google, I will mention five that I like very much. This is not easy for me since there is not a Christmas hymn that I do not enjoy hearing. The first Christmas hymn ever sung was by choirs of angels who sang *Glory to God in the Highest*. The hymn *O Come All Ye Faithful* captures this wondrous moment. The angels speak to us: *O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem. Come and behold Him, born the King of angels; O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.* To adore God, to fall on our knees before the infant is to recognize the fundamental truth that we are not God; we are creatures. God is Lord of Heaven and Earth and reveals himself in his son Jesus. At this Mass, at every Mass that you attend, you are adoring God and praising him for all that he has given us. The world you and I live says we are the center of everything. We are in charge of all that is. Not true. God is God and we are his sons and daughters. Let us come and adore him and recognize that truth.

I love hearing the song *O Holy Night*, especially when sung by a soloist. Part of the lyrics sung are: *Oh, Holy Night the Stars Are brightly shining It is the night of the dear Savior's birth Long lay the world in sin and error pining 'Til He appeared and the soul felt It's worth a thrill of hope the weary world rejoices.* The world is weary. After so much news of deadly hurricanes and earthquakes, the ongoing threat of terrorism and the fear of war, we need hope. The birth of Christ shouts the voice of God that he will never give up on this world and on us. As much as human beings sin and mess it up, his love is without end. Jesus Christ is our Savior with the promise of eternal life for his children. This night, amid chaos and confusion, give us hope.

*Silent Night* is probably the most popular of all Christmas hymns. Here is the last verse of the hymn: *Silent night, holy night Son of God, love's pure light Radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.* With all the rush and pressure of Christmas, the shopping, the cooking, the wrapping, the decorating, we may need a silent night. The song speaks to me about not missing the baby during all the celebrating. God, who created the heaven and earth, creator of oceans and mountains, comes among us as a baby. Christianity is the only religious faith that believes God became human, one of us, and like us in all things but sin. May we never get use to that most astounding truth. I am not sure if you will know the hymn *Tu Scende Dalle Stelle*. It is an Christmas song written more than two hundred years ago by a Neapolitan priest named St. Alphonsus Liguori. St. Alphonsus is very special to me since he is the founder of the religious order I belong to called the Redemptorist. Alphonsus lived in a time when people were very afraid of God and felt God was going to condemn them to hell. This song tells of the love that God

has for us: *Oh, my Divine Baby I see you trembling here, Oh Blessed God, Ah, how much it cost you, your loving me. Ah, how much it cost you, your loving me.* We know the cost of the love of God will bring him to the cross on Calvary.

My final song is a modern song that when I heard it for the first time, it moved me as it still does. It is called *A New York City Christmas* by Rob Thomas. The song, and to me it is a hymn, reminds us that Christmas is about the love God has for us, but that this love must move us to love one another: those in our family, our friends, our neighbors, the poor and desperate, the forgotten; we hear these lyrics: *call on your Angels, come down to the city Let's crowd around the big tree, all you strangers you know me Bring your compassion, bring your forgiveness Lord, how we need it on this New York City Christmas.*

*My brothers and sisters, O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the King.*