

Behind the Hymn: Before the Starry Universe

For years I had been writing new texts for familiar Christmas tunes that had no accessible Christian text. In each case I tried to maintain something of the flavor of the original text and tune. For example:

Love Has Come! (“Bring a Torch, Jeannette, Isabella”)

The Promise (“The Holly and the Ivy”)

Infinite Lord (“Coventry Carol”)

Light Is Shining All Around (“Ding, Dong, Merrily on High”)

Partners in the Mystery (“Good King Wenceslas”)

Deck the Halls

Here We Come Rejoicing (“Here We Come A-wassailing”)

Jesus (“Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring”)

On Christmas Day (“I Saw Three Ships”)

The Flower (“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming”)

The Lamb of Christmas (“The Friendly Beasts”)

During the 2002 Christmas season, I heard a performance of “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen” and realized how wonderfully rich and mysterious the tune is. But the text, though familiar, is somewhat obscure. Most people don’t even understand the opening line.

With all the Christmas songs available, what text could I provide that would be fresh and meaningful? A few days later I was drawn toward the pre-Christmas part of the Christmas story. We rarely set Christ’s birth in the whole context of God’s sweeping plan of salvation, and I knew of no hymns that treated this. The ancient, mysterious quality of the tune seemed to match the ancient, mysterious quality of that part of the story.

Before the Starry Universe was completed on Christmas morning, 2002, and was first sung as part of our family Christmas celebration that day.

--Ken Bible

Hymn: [Before the Starry Universe](#)