

BOOK REVIEW

By Thomas E. Little, Ed.D.

O Come Emmanuel, By Gordon Giles

Paraclete Press | Brewster, Mass, 2006 | \$14.95 Paperback

IN A WORLD WHERE I FOUND *All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth* on an internet site's list of "Christmas Carols" we sorely need volumes like Gordon Giles' *O Come Emmanuel*. Billed as a "musical tour of daily readings for Advent and Christmas," Giles deftly blends scripture, song and story with the tradition of the French "circle dance," and leads the "caroller" in a celebration of the great themes of Christmas weaved through the thirty seven days from Advent through Epiphany.

Tradition tells us St Francis of Assisi introduced Christmas carols to church services in the 12th century. And, except for a vain attempt at extinction by Oliver Cromwell, the carols of Christmas have been an enduring part of the season ever since. But even with all that exposure, how many of us really appreciate the treasures to be found in these songs of the season? Giles gently guides us to a new appreciation of our heritage in a "devotional" format, where each brief reflection blends an introductory scripture passage, the lyrics of a carol, the liturgical context and historical background of the selection and, before leaving each reflection, a brief prayer to celebrate the meaning of the season – our Christmas feast of God's love incarnate in Christ, the Lord.

If you have been guilty of singing carols without due attention to their meaning and message, here is a resource to consider some of the more famous Christmas carols that we sometimes sing without a passing thought. You will meet famous and obscure saints, poets and musicians who have provided us this unique heritage of faith

and appreciate again the bounty in these seasonal songs. From the obscure *Come Thou Redeemer of the Earth* to *People Look East*, to the standard *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, this guide is a gift in its

diversity and in the obvious delight that the Rev. Giles had in assembling the resource. How wonderful is a devotional that includes essays on *In the Bleak Mid-Winter*, *Good King Wenceslas*, the work of Vaughan Williams and the music of Taize as well as the story of the real twelve days of Christmas, and, my favorite, the link between *Masters In The Hall* and Mary's *Magnificat*.

The Christmas season provides us opportunities to enjoy our faith wrapped in songs we love to sing. In this lovely book we learn that, like the hymn, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, hardly any of us come pristine and unchanged to the feast. Yet, even with the revisions we have made to God's gifts, we can be restored in the coming of the new Adam, Emmanuel, God with us.

This is a nicely done, thoughtful gift for music directors, choir members, musicians or for anyone who cares about the poetry of church history, who loves thinking theologically about music or would benefit from a chance to do so. ♡

You may order O Come Emmanuel, or any of your Christmas gift books from our bookstore. It's a fine way to support the Spiritual Center and give thoughtful gifts for Christmas or any time of the year.

