

1 John 1:1-4

Good Christians, All Rejoice!

Really and truly

Good Christians, all rejoice is a lively carol, the first mention of which came in the 14th century, but earliest manuscripts date from the 1400's. It was not published until 1533 in Germany. According to a website on hymns, "The carol is part of the late medieval tradition of teaching Bible stories to peasants by means of folk music. The original bilingual text combined Latin and German. John M. Neale provided a rather free English paraphrase that was published in his *Carols for Christmastide* (1853)."¹ If you were to look at the music in our hymnbook you would find most of that information right there.

As I was sharing with the children, songs are a great way to remember things, such as our ABC's, or just help us to work better. The voyageurs knew this when paddling canoes, and children can use songs to help them clean up toys. Gypsies used music to help them remember the news, creating stories and sharing wherever they went.

The ability to use music as a means of transferring knowledge has been recognized for centuries. The Psalms are called the hymnbook of the Bible because the words are thought to be songs of the Hebrew people once used in the Temple Worship. The Good News of God's love and Jesus Christ's saving grace for people throughout the world and throughout history has naturally been shared through music.

So it is that hymns should tell of the Christmas story. *Silent Night, Joy to the World, Go tell it on the Mountain*, are all carols that many of us can sing nearly by heart. This was the intent of what was originally, *Good Christian, men rejoice*. This is a carol meant to help people get a sense of the joy, hope, and gift of Jesus birth. We are to sing with heart and soul and voice. This is a story to be known, experienced, and shared.

The reason for the carol is not unlike the letter written by the Apostle John, likely written at a time when Christianity was about 50-60 years old. By this time a whole generation had grown up in Christian homes. John is now an elderly man who had experienced many things and he has not waivered from his faith in Jesus. As a younger man he wrote the Gospel in order to bring people to a belief in Jesus. As he writes in John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to *believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through *believing* you may have life in his name."

¹ https://hymnary.org/text/good_christian_men_rejoice. Accessed December 1, 2018.

The reason for writing the letter that we know as 1 John was so “that those who believe in Christ might KNOW that they have eternal life” (5:13).² This is a letter for those who are already Christians. If one were to read the entire epistle you would see the compassionate caring side of John as well as the reason he was named the “son of Thunder.”

We are only going to look at the first four verses from the letter, but this short passage tells us three things; Jesus is the Word of Life revealed, the Word of Life experienced, and the Word of Life shared.

First, the Word of Life Is Revealed. Verse one says,

¹We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— (NRSV)

John is talking about Jesus being present from the beginning of time, but having broken into human history, the disciples, and all those who came in contact with Jesus heard his words with their own ears, saw him with their own eyes, and have touched him. John is telling us that Jesus was real and just as real to John at the end of his life as he was when Jesus called him to come and follow.

Second the Word of Life Is Experienced. Verse 2 says,

²this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— (NRSV)

John has not waived. John will defend and declare Jesus because he knew Jesus the man. He walked with him, ate with him, and was at the cross when Jesus hung there, was at the empty tomb, and present when Jesus ascended. John has experienced Jesus and more. It is because of this that John also refers to Jesus as the “eternal life that was with the Father.” What we often forget about our faith is that it is about more than life right now, it is also about life after death, eternal life. In this post-modern era, we often ignore or do not trust what is mystery. We want explanations. In our faith we can and should ask questions, but there is also a place for mystery, for belief in the witness and experiences we have had, and we have read, and know about from others.

Finally, Jesus is the Word of Life Shared. Hear verses 3 and 4,

³we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

² Mears, Henrietta C. *What the Bible is all About*. Regal Books. Ventura, California. ©1966. Page 609.

Jesus is revealed, experienced, and shared. John has shared his experience in his gospel and now in this letter. Christian Educator, Henrietta Mears, who inspired such people as Billy Graham, wrote, "The Gospel [of John] was written to show men how they might receive eternal life. The Epistle of 1 John was written to assure those who have believed that they *have* eternal life by believing "that Jesus is the Christ.""³

John wrote for the people of his time but his words are still relevant to us. This letter was once referred to by someone as the "Really and truly epistle." What John writes about really and truly occurred. Jesus really and truly lived, taught, healed, died, and rose again. We really and truly have the gift of eternal life and fellowship now and always with God the Father *and* with his Son. We really and truly need to believe it.

We really and truly can know Jesus revealed. We really and truly can experience Jesus in our life time through scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit in us and in the community of faith. We really and truly need to share this with others as it is life-giving in the present time and always.

We are connected to Jesus, to Christians of all generations, the saints that have gone before us in our history, in our families, and in our church. We have fellowship with one another and in that we find strength, hope, wisdom, a common experience, and in the end joy. With those who have sung the hymn for generations, telling the story of Christmas we proclaim, Good Christians, all rejoice! With heart and soul and voice! Christ has opened heaven's door, and we are blest forevermore. Christ was born for this! Christ was born to save!

³ Ibid.