

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

START

GOD REST YE MERRY, GENTLEMEN LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY

REMEMBER CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR WAS BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY

TO SAVE US ALL FROM SATAN'S POWER WHEN WE WERE GONE ASTREY

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Lyrics

<i>The Beauties of the Magazines (1775)</i>	<i>Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern, W. B. Sandys (1833)</i>	<i>Carols for Choirs (1961)</i>
<p>1. God rest you, merry gentlemen, Let nothing you dismay, Remember Christ our Saviour Was born on Christmas-day To save poor souls from Satan's power, Which long time had gone astray. <i>And it is tidings of comfort and joy.</i></p>	<p>1. God rest you merry, gentlemen Let nothing you dismay For Jesus Christ, our Saviour Was born upon this day, To save us all from Satan's power When we were gone astray. <i>O tidings of comfort and joy, For Jesus Christ, our Saviour was born on Christmas day.</i></p>	<p>1. God rest you merry, gentlemen, Let nothing you dismay, For Jesus Christ our Saviour Was born upon this day, To save us all from Satan's power When we were gone astray: <i>O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy.</i></p>
<p>2. From God that is our Father The blessed angels came Unto some certain shepherds, With tidings of the same; That he was born in Bethlehem The Son of God by name. <i>And it is, etc.</i></p>	<p>2. In Bethlehem, in Jury This blessed babe was born And laid within a manger Upon this blessed morn The which his mother Mary Nothing did take in scorn. <i>O tidings, &c.'</i></p>	<p>2. From God our heavenly Father A blessed angel came, And unto certain shepherds Brought tidings of the same, How that in Bethlehem was born The Son of God by name: <i>O tidings ...</i></p>
<p>3. Now when they came to Bethlehem, Where our sweet Saviour lay, They found him in a manger Where oxen feed on hay. The blessed Virgin kneeling down Unto the Lord did pray. <i>And it is, etc.</i></p>	<p>3. From God our Heavenly Father A blessed Angel came, And unto certain Shepherds Brought tidings of the same, How that in Bethlehem was born The Son of God by name. <i>O tidings, &c.</i></p>	<p>3. The shepherds at those tidings Rejoiced much in mind, And left their flocks a-feeding In tempest, storm and wind, And went to Bethlehem straightway, This blessed Babe to find: <i>O tidings ...</i></p>
<p>4. With sudden joy and gladness, The shepherds were beguil'd, To see the Babe of Israel Before his mother mild. O then with joy and cheerfulness Rejoice each mother's child. <i>And it is, etc.</i></p>	<p>4. Fear not, then said the Angel, Let nothing you affright, This day is born a Saviour Of virtue, power and might; So frequently to vanquish all The friends of Satan quite. <i>O tidings, &c.</i></p>	<p>4. But when to Bethlehem they came, Whereat this Infant lay, They found Him in a manger, Where oxen feed on hay; His mother Mary kneeling, Unto the Lord did pray: <i>O tidings ...</i></p>
<p>5. Now to the Lord sing praises, All you within this place Like we true loving brethren, Each other to embrace, For the merry time of Christmas Is coming on a-pace. <i>And it is, etc.</i></p>	<p>5. The Shepherds at those tidings Rejoiced much in mind, And left their flocks a feeding In tempest, storm and wind, And went to Bethlehem straightway, This blessed babe to find. <i>O tidings, &c.</i></p>	<p>5. Now to the Lord sing praises, All you within this place, And with true love and brotherhood Each other now embrace; This holy tide of Christmas All other doth deface: <i>O tidings ...</i></p>
<p><no further couplets></p>	<p>6. But when to Bethlehem they came, Whereas this infant lay, They found him in a manger, Where oxen feed on hay, His mother Mary kneeling Unto the Lord did pray. <i>O tidings, &c.</i> 7. Now to the Lord sing praises, All you within this place, And with true love and brotherhood Each other now embrace; This holy tide of Christmas All other doth deface. <i>O tidings, &c.</i></p>	<p><no further couplets></p>

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GOD REST YE MERRY,
GENTLEMEN

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History and Origin

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen is an English traditional Christmas carol. It is in the Roxburghe Collection, and is listed as no. 394 in the Roud Folk Song Index. It is also known as Tidings of Comfort and Joy, and by variant incipits as Come All You Worthy Gentlemen; God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen; God Rest Ye, Merry Christians; or God Rest You Merry People All.

It is one of the oldest extant carols, dated to the 16th century or earlier. The earliest known printed edition of the carol is in a broadsheet dated 1760. The traditional English melody is in the minor mode; the earliest printed edition of the melody appears to be in a parody, in the 1829 *Facetiae* of William Hone. It had been traditional and associated with the carol since at least the mid-18th century, when it was recorded by James Nares under the title "The old Christmas Carol".

The carol is referred to in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, 1843: "... 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."

This carol also is featured in the second movement of the 1927 *Carol Symphony* by Victor Hely-Hutchinson.

The transitive use of the verb *rest* in the sense "to keep, cause to continue to remain" is typical of 16th- to 17th-century language (the phrase *rest you merry* is recorded in the 1540s). Etymonline.com notes that the first line "often is mis-punctuated" as "God rest you, merry gentlemen" because in contemporary language, *rest* has lost its use "with a predicate adjective following and qualifying the object" (*Century Dictionary*). This is the case already in the 1775 variant, and is also reflected by Dickens' replacement of the verb *rest* by *bless* in his 1843 quote of the incipit as "God bless you, merry gentlemen". The adjective *merry* in Early Modern English had a wider sense of "pleasant; bountiful, prosperous". Some variants give the pronoun in the first line as *ye* instead of *you*, in a pseudo-archaism. In fact, *ye* would never have been correct, because *ye* is a subjective (nominative) pronoun only, never an objective (accusative) pronoun.

A variant text was printed in 1775 in *The Beauties of the Magazines, and Other Periodical Works, Selected for a Series of Years*. This text was reproduced from the song-sheet bought from a caroler in the street. This version is shown on page 2 alongside the version reported by W. B. Sandys (1833) and the version adopted by *Carols for Choirs* (OUP, 1961), which has become the de facto baseline reference in the UK.

Recordings

- Gustav Holst included this, along with another carol, Good Christian Men, Rejoice, in his 1910 choral fantasy Christmas Day, with accompaniment for orchestra or organ.
- Bing Crosby first released his version on the 1945 album Merry Christmas and then in subsequent re-releases.
- We Wish You a Metal Xmas and a Headbanging New Year includes a metal version sang by Ronnie James Dio, with the arrangement and guitar solo by Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi.
- The American synth-pop neoclassical band Mannheim Steamroller offered two different arrangements on their 1984 album Mannheim Steamroller Christmas.
- Mariah Carey recorded a short version of the song and used as an bonus track for her 1994 multi-platinum holiday album Merry Christmas.
- In 1994 Apogee Software released the video game Rise of the Triad for the DOS operating system. If the internal clock of the player's computer indicated that the date was 25 December, the game's background music was replaced with an up-beat arrangement of "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen," by Lee Jackson, called "God Rest Ye Deadly Gentlemen."
- In 1995 Savatage, an American heavy metal band, first released the popular instrumental "Christmas Eve (Sarajevo 12/24)" on their album Dead Winter Dead. Although often described as a medley of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"/"Carol of the Bells," it is actually a stylized rendition of "Carol of the Bells" using as an introduction only the first line of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," which then is restated later in the piece. The composition was re-released by the American progressive rock band Trans-Siberian Orchestra (which group includes former band members of Savatage) on their 1996 album Christmas Eve and Other Stories. The song has since become a staple of their live performances and a success for the band.
- American saxophonist Kenny G lent his rendition of the song into his 2002 holiday album Wishes: A Holiday Album.
- Canadian rock band Barenaked Ladies, in collaboration with guest vocalist Sarah McLachlan, released a medley of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen/We Three Kings" on the 2004 album Barenaked for the Holidays.
- American a cappella group Pentatonix released their own version of the song in their 2016 Christmas album, A Pentatonix Christmas. This version was also used in the 2018 animated film The Grinch and its soundtrack.
- In 2008 Canadian musician Loreena McKennitt released a version with a distinctly "middle-eastern" sound to it.
- Annie Lennox's first holiday album, A Christmas Cornucopia, released in 2010, includes "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" which was released as the second digital single with notable video.
- In 2017, Riverdale cast sang a version of the song, which was featured in the episode "Chapter Twenty-Two: Silent Night, Deadly Night".

Popular Use

- The British Army parody song "Christmas Day in the Cookhouse" uses the same chorus.
- Taiwanese singer and actress Angela Chang recorded a song, "Fables" (寓言 in Chinese) using the same chorus but different words.
- Tom Lehrer, in his song "A Christmas Carol", included the line "God rest ye merry, merchants, may ye make the Yuletide pay..."
- Allan Sherman parodied the carol in "Shticks and Stones" in his album My Son, the Folk Singer.
- A parody titled "The Restroom Door Said Gentlemen" was included in the album Twisted Christmas with other Christmas carol parodies.
- The familiar melody to the song has been used for commercial purposes: in December 2015, Walmart released a TV commercial advertising the Walmart credit card with rewritten lyrics sung by actor and comedian Craig Robinson to Ian Gary.
- A Christmas episode of the BBC TV series All Creatures Great and Small was titled "Merry Gentlemen", in ironic reference to Siegfried's urging his colleagues to sing the song correctly, with a pause between "merry" and "gentlemen".
- In the episode "Molokai" of Radio 4's sitcom Cabin Pressure, Arthur sings the first line as "get dressed you merry gentleman". He believes that the gentleman are "in bed! It's saying, 'Come on, merry gentlemen, it's Christmas! Up and at 'em; get dressed; let's do our stockings!'"
- In the movie Office Christmas Party, a metal version is played at a Christmas party. Performed by Ronnie James Dio.
- In Ian Fleming's novel On Her Majesty's Secret Service, as James Bond skis down Piz Gloria escaping from Ernst Stavro Blofeld, Blofeld's agents fire flares into the night sky attempting to create a lethal avalanche. Bond sees the pretty bursts of light and wonders what the townsfolk below will think, and then recalls that it is Christmas Eve. The townspeople will interpret the explosions as a Christmas celebration of some sort. Bond then says to himself, "God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing ye dismay!"