

## **Lecture #23 – Music for Special Days**

### **I. Introduction**

Music is woven throughout our lives, and often the richest musical tapestries are found around special occasions. We often reflect the times and seasons in the music of our churches.

One note to be made that applies to all occasions, is that since most of these seasonal songs are typically used one or maybe twice per year most singers and musicians do not have a good mastery of them. We may sing “Amazing Grace” multiple times throughout the year, but “Low in the Grave He Lay” or “O Come, All Ye Faithful” once a year. This means that special and diligent preparation is often needed leading up to using these songs.

### **II. Easter**

One of the greatest shames about our hymnody is that Easter does not have a rich treasury of songs to choose from. You would think the hymnal would be filled with songs celebrating the Resurrection because of its vast importance. I would challenge you to learn every song about the Resurrection in your hymnal.

#### **Congregational Songs**

Typical songs that are used are:

- “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” – Charles Wesley
- “Low in the Grave He Lay” – Robert Lowry
- “One Day” – J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles Marsh
- “He Lives” – A.H. Ackley<sup>1</sup>
- “Because He Lives” – Bill and Gloria Gaither<sup>2</sup>

Other songs to consider using:

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<sup>1</sup> There is a debate about the theology of the chorus, which bases our belief in Christ’s Resurrection on an experiential feeling and not faith in revelation.

<sup>2</sup> Can I be honest? The more I hear this song the less I like it. It is written in a P&W style by two of the pioneers of contemporary P&W music. The second verse (“how sweet to hold a newborn baby”, etc.) is pure sentimentalism. The rhythm is difficult and the only reason it is sung by a congregation with any confidence is because of familiarity.

- “Lead Me to Calvary” by Jennie Hussey and William Kirkpatrick
- “Crown Him with Many Crowns” – Matthew Bridges and George Elvey
- “Were You There?” – Traditional/Spiritual

Avoid:

- “He is Lord” – Steve Vest and others<sup>3</sup>
  - The song is in a P&W style and has origins in the Jesus People movement.
  - Note - *Majesty Hymns* wrongly attributes this song to Frank Garlock.
- “In the Garden” – C. Austin Miles
  - Sentimental with no depth.
- “He Lives on High” – B.B. McKinney
  - The tune is based on a Hawaiian folk song, so likely people will be distracted during the chorus as they are thinking of “Aloha Oe”.

### Special Music

Easter is a great time for choir specials and ensembles. Try to add an extra special or two to the service.

Avoid:

- “Glorious Day (Living He Loved Me)” – by Casting Crowns
  - An attempt to “update” a traditional song by infusing it with P&W elements and awkward bridges.
- “In Christ Alone” by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend
  - A modern “hymn” driven by a P&W beat.

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<sup>3</sup> Looks like a lot of people have added verses or altered the lyrics.

### **III. Christmas**

There is no holiday that has so rich a heritage of music as Christmas. For over a month people will listen to Christmas songs on the radio.

One great danger to beware of is the increasing secularization of Christmas. Most popular songs produced today for the holiday season are either nostalgic or festive with little reference to the true meaning of Christmas. The songs in our churches must remain religious.

#### **Congregational Songs**

Typical songs that are used are:

- “Angels We Have Heard on High” – Traditional
- “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” – Charles Wesley and Felix Mendelssohn
- “Joy to the World” by Isaac Watts and George Handel<sup>4</sup>
- “O Come, All Ye Faithful” – Latin hymn
- “The First Noel” – Traditional carol
- “O Little Town of Bethlehem” - Philips Brooks and Leis Redner
- “Silent Night” - Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber
- “Angels From the Realms of Glory” – James Montgomery and Henry Smart
- “Away in a Manger” – NOT MARTIN LUTHER
  - Don’t neglect the CRADLE SONG tune!
- “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” – Latin Hymn
- “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus” – Charles Wesley and Rowland Prichard
- “Good Christian Men, Rejoice” – Traditional carol<sup>5</sup>
- “What Child is This?” William Dix and Traditional tune
- “Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne” by Emily Elliot and Timothy Matthews

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<sup>4</sup> Technically not a Christmas song if you read the lyrics.

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes “updated” as “Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

Other songs to consider using:

- “The Birthday of a King” - William Harold Neidlinger
- “In the Bleak Mid-Winter” – Christina Rossetti and Gustave Holst
- “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” – Traditional carol

Avoid:

- “Go Tell It on the Mountain” – Traditional/Spiritual
  - Works best as a children’s special.
- “Joy to the World” – Hoyt Axton (famously recorded by Three Dog Night in 1970)
  - Just don’t. It is not Christmas, and it is not Christian.
- “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” by Edmund Sears and Richard Willis
  - The author was Unitarian and the message more utopian than Christian.
- “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and J. Baptist Calkin
  - Beautiful poem, little theology.
- “We Three Kings” by John Henry Hopkins
  - Questionable statements, plus you have to sing all the verses for it to make sense.
- “O Holy Night”
  - Timing and range issues for untrained singers, plus some odd theology.
- “Good King Wenceslas” – Traditional
  - Neat story, but why?
- “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” – Traditional
  - Better known as a seasonal song, good for closing children’s programs

## Special Music

Avoid:

- “Little Drummer Boy” - Katherine Kennicott Davis
  - There is nothing redeemable in this song.
- “Mary, Did You Know?” – Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene
  - She did.
- Anything that has to do with “Hallelujah” by Leonard Cohen
  - The original is blasphemous, regardless of the lyrics you use.

## **III. Patriotic Days**

On Patriotic holidays (July 4<sup>th</sup>, Memorial Day, Veteran’s Day, etc.) it is fitting to acknowledge God’s blessings upon our nation but remember that we do not gather to worship our nation. We gather to worship God.

## Congregational Songs

I would recommend against doing patriotic songs for every congregational song. Open with one or two, but bring the attention back to God as the service progresses.

Typical songs that are used are:

- “America the Beautiful” – Katherine Bates and Samuel Ward.
- “America” or “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” – by S.F. Smith and Henry Carey.
- “Battle Hymn of the Republic” – Julia Ward Howe and William Steffe<sup>6</sup>

Other songs to consider using:

- “Texas, Our Texas” by William J. Marsh
- “God of Our Fathers” – Daniel C. Roberts and George Warren

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<sup>6</sup> “In the beauty of the lilies...” is not right, among other issues.

Avoid:

- “Faith of Our Fathers” – Frederick Faber and H.F. Henry
  - Doesn’t really talk about God or nation.
- “Star-Spangled Banner” – Francis Scott Key
  - It is more customary to use it a special, and it is difficult to sing.

DO NOT USE:

- “Dixie” – Daniel Decatur Emmett
  - Must I explain?