

Hymns and Carols Shape Our Faith

Greetings!

Music has profound power to shape human experience, affecting our emotions, memory, and view of the world. Perhaps you have heard a song and found yourself transported to another time and place, recalling images, scents, tastes, and feelings that you may not have considered for a long time. Even persons with advanced dementia who have become non-verbal can often still sing beloved songs!

Our deep connection to music is an element of our sensorial experience as human beings. Because God always comes to us as we are, music is often part of our most profound experiences of prayer. You may have heard the phrase “lex orandi, lex credendi,” which means the way we pray deeply affects our belief. Another way to think about this is to say that we are formed liturgically: what we experience in the Mass transforms us and conforms us more closely to Christ. Sometimes we add an additional phrase “lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi.” How we pray shapes what we believe, which changes our way of living. Hymns—words of prayer that express our belief—transform the imagination and help us discern how we are to live in a world deeply in need of Christ’s light.

The words we sing as we contemplate the mysteries of Advent and Christmas become part of what we believe and how we live.

As the liturgical year begins, our gaze turns to the mystery of the incarnation. We meditate on the proclamations of the prophets, the Blessed Mother, and John the Baptist as they anticipated the Messiah and the world he would bring. We wonder about who Jesus is for us in our moment in history and how he is calling us to take new steps on our path of discipleship.



Music touches the heart and helps us internalize and live our faith.

Because of music’s special place in human life, the words we sing as we contemplate the mysteries of Advent and Christmas become part of what we believe and how we live. We meditate on names: Emmanuel, Wisdom, Key of David, Bright and Morning Star (“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”). We proclaim Jesus the “king of angels” and call all people to adore him (“O Come Let Us Adore Him”). We remember his teachings and the hope we have in them, as in “O Holy Night” we sing:

Truly he taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother;
And in his name all oppression shall cease.

The music of Advent and Christmas invite us more deeply into the mystery of God’s love. Be intentional to take some time to sing favorite hymns and carols this Advent and Christmas season. As you sing, invite the children and loved ones in your family to reflect on the words of each song and how they speak to you of the God who is with us and the ways he is calling each one of us to bring his light to the world.