



Carols always special part of our Christmas

Carols, according to the Gage Canadian dictionary, are songs or hymns of joy and not necessarily associated with Christmas. Most people in Canada, however, would equate Christmas and carols as synonymous.

Christmas music, especially the carols, is a very special part of the Christmas celebration around the world. Caroling is a Christmas tradition that allows the beauty of music to be shared.

Many ancient carols were composed to commemorate or retell the stories and customs surrounding the Christmas celebration, before books were printed and before most people could read them. Some of them were dance forms, from which the word "carol" derives.

There are two categories of carols – traditional and religious. Examples of the former evolved in England during the medieval period.

Traditional carols were sung in the language of the people, rather than in Latin, and were less religious. They were derived from traditional drinking feasting or folk songs, straying from the religious themes found in music of the church.

In the early days, carols were sung by "waits," or bands of men and boys singing outdoors, usually for money. By the 14th century these traditional carols, often accompanied with dancing, were firmly entrenched as part of the festivities surrounding Christmas.

Carols, or hymns, are still very much an essential part of the caroling repertoire. Some of this devotional and inspiring music has been composed by world-famous composers such as Handel ("Joy To The World"), Bach ("How Brightly Beams the Morning Star") and Mendelssohn ("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing").

Their lyrics generally focus on the birth of Christ as told in the Gospels of St. Luke and St. Matthew. Martin Luther wrote the words to "Away in a Manger."

What is probably the most authentic Canadian Christmas carol was originally called "Jesous Ahatonhia" composed by Jean Brebeuf, Jesuit missionary to Huronia, in the 1640s, with Huron words and a French tune. It has since been translated into French as, *Jesus est Nee*, and in English as, *The Huron Carol*.

No matter where they originated or how many times they are played or sung, Christmas carols never seem to lose their appeal, even though shopping

malls and plazas play them well before the Christmas season.

During World War I, German and British troops faced each other over terrain terraced and destroyed by trenches and shell holes, soldiers on both sides are said to have taken up the carol *Silent Night* started by one lone German soldier, his heart no doubt back in his native Bavaria. The war was forgotten and there were dreams of heavenly peace.

Mistletoe kiss an old Norse custom

Kissing under the mistletoe, a custom which provides much merriment at Christmas family parties, owes its origins to the culture of Norse, the warlike people who ravaged Europe for centuries.

Mistletoe was thought to be sacred by ancient Europeans. Druid priests employed it in their sacrifices to the gods, while Celtic people felt it possessed miraculous healing powers. In fact, in the Celtic language mistletoe means "all heal."

It was thought mistletoe not only cured disease, but could also render poisons harmless, make humans and animals prolific, keep one safe from witchcraft, protect the house from ghosts and even make them speak. It was also thought to bring good luck to anyone privileged to have it.

Norsemen had a symbolic myth about mistletoe. The story goes that mistletoe was the sacred plant of Frigga, goddess of love and the mother of Balder, the god of summer sun. Balder had a dream of death, which greatly alarmed his mother, for should he die, all life on earth would end.

It is related the tears she shed for her son turned into the pearly white berries on the mistletoe plant. In her joy Frigga kissed everyone who passed beneath the tree on which it grew.

The story ends with a decree that who should ever stand under the humble mistletoe, no harm should befall them, only kiss a token of love.

Later, the eighteenth-century English credited mistletoe not with healing powers, but with a certain magical appeal called a kissing ball.

At Christmas time a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe, brightly trimmed with evergreens, ribbons, and ornaments, cannot refuse to be kissed. Such a kiss could mean deep romance or lasting friendship and goodwill.

If the girl remained un-kissed, she couldn't expect to take a trip to the altar the following year.

That first Christmas

According to Luke 2:1-16

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone

around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you; you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

When the angels had left them and gone to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that had taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger.

Luke (2:1-16)

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