

Good King Wenceslas (It's all about Mercy)

A Christmas Program for the Congregation and Its Children

By Bernhard Seter



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OPENING HYMN - "O Come, All Ye Faithful" LSB 379

INVOCATION

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Pastor: When all was still, and it was midnight,

People: Your almighty Word, O Lord, descended from the royal throne.

Pastor: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

People: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

When the Kindness and Generosity of God our Savior appeared He saved us ... according to His mercy (Heb. 3:4).

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pastor: The kindness and generosity of God has appeared, and He has saved us because He was merciful. He saved us through His gift of light and life. Our Lord Jesus in His great mercy came among us as one of us because we could not find light and life on our own. Let us humble ourselves before our Savior the child of Bethlehem and Lord of Creation, confess before Him the sin in our hearts and lives, trust in His continued mercy, and ask for God's forgiveness.

(Silence for personal reflection and confession.)

Pastor: Merciful Father,

People: We confess that we have rebelled against You and that often we take Your mercy for granted. We forget about Your great mercy for us, and we refuse to be merciful to others. Some of our sin we know about, and some is hidden even to us. We have not loved You with all our heart, nor have we honored You with our lives. We have sinned in our thoughts, words, and actions. Forgive us, we pray, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Pastor: God has given you a gift — the Gift of His Son — mercy wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Mercy that went to the cross for you. Mercy that rose from death to life that you might have life. As a called and ordained servant, and at the command and promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Pastor: Let us pray. O God, You make this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that as we have known the mysteries of that Light on earth, we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

Pastor: We are going to be led tonight in worship by our young people. The story they will tell is all about mercy, the kindness and generosity of God our Savior that appeared in Christ the Child of Bethlehem, the Savior of the World.

THE CAROL – “Good King Wenceslas”

(Sung by all)

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| 1. Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gath'ring winter fuel. | And the bitter weather. |
| 2. “Hither, page, and stand by me
If thou know'st telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?”
“Sire, he lives a good league hence
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain.” | 4. “Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer.”
“Mark my footsteps, my good page
Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.” |
| 3. “Bring me flesh and bring me wine
Bring me pine logs hither
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear him thither.”
Page and monarch forth they went
Forth they went together
Through the rude wind's wild lament | 5. In his master's steps he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing. |

GOOD KING WENCESLAS (IT'S ALL ABOUT MERCY) CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

- Teacher 1:** I have a lot of trouble with that carol. It is really not a hymn. I'm not sure that it is a good thing to use for our children's Christmas program.
- Teacher 2:** What's the problem? It's all about mercy. A king, being merciful to one of his poor subjects. I don't see why that should be a problem. It takes place on the Feast of Stephen – the day after Christmas when we remember the first person killed for their witness to Jesus and also one of the first deacons – people set aside by the church to perform acts of mercy.
- Teacher 1:** That is all well and good, but this is a Christmas program – Jesus is never mentioned. The king is portrayed as a saint who does a miracle. The poor page bothers me. The king should give him the night off if he wants to be merciful. Why not invite the poor man to his castle if he wants to be merciful? Why is there a poor man? Isn't there a government program for this sort of thing?
- Teacher 2:** I guess those are good points. But think of it like this: The king is Christ, and we are the poor man and the page. We have been served by our King, and now we are invited to share in the serving. Whenever we see poverty, want, pain, or suffering, we are free to serve because our King served us first. It's all about mercy.
- Teacher 1:** But what does that have to do with Christmas?
- Teacher 2:** Everything. Christmas is God's mercy. When the kindness and generosity of God our Savior appeared – when His mercy appeared – He saved us by the Child in the manger.
- Teacher 1:** You will have to convince me.
- Teacher 2:** Okay, let's try.

The Children

- Reader 1:** The Bible is full of stories of a King who loves to serve,
and give His subjects gifts they really don't deserve.
- Reader 2:** Who cares for everybody from the greatest to the least;
who dresses them for banquets and invites them all to feasts.
- Reader 3:** Who says to folks like David, "You can't do for me,
but I am building you a house that will last eternally."
- Reader 4:** And He kept the promise in a house that none were looking for,
a Kingdom that would never end, but last forevermore.
- Teacher 1:** Wait, what are you talking about?

- Reader 5:** *Read 2 Sam. 7:1-17. (This and subsequent Bible verses can be read by older children or teachers.)*
- Reader 6:** The way God kept that promise was really even stranger.
He had Jesus born in Bethlehem and laid him in a manger.
- Reader 7:** Jesus became the King who ruled over the house God spoke of
and He made the house eternal, that simple house of Jacob.
- Reader 8:** The angel told Mary about that house and the coming, saving Lord
and she said, "Be it done to me according to your Word."
- Reader 9:** And she went off and sang a song about the King who knew our lot
and how He treats us mercifully in the beautiful Magnificat.
- Reader 10:** *Read Luke 1: 26-56. (See Production Notes on the last page.)*
- Reader 11:** We started out by singing of a king who went to feed
a lowly member of His kingdom, someone who was in need.
- Reader 12:** We are talking about kings who show mercy and give,
and their subjects receive it and abundantly live.
- Reader 13:** That mercy freely given the king wants the subjects to share
and live their lives in such a way that others see their care.
- Reader 14:** He wants us to serve him in the Kingdom of righteousness and peace
and share our many blessing with the lowly and the least.
- Reader 15:** Another song in Luke, the song of Zechariah
tells about this King of mercy and the coming great Messiah.
- Reader 16:** This King is all about giving and he is certainly no miser,
so listen to Zechariah's song. His son was John the Baptizer.
- Reader 17:** *Read Luke 1:68-79. (See Production Notes on the last page.)*
- Reader 18:** We learn in the catechism that Jesus is Messiah, Prophet, Priest, and King
and by His birth in Bethlehem, His Kingdom he would bring.
- Reader 19:** He died that we might be forgiven from our sins to set us free,
and then follow in His footsteps in a life of charity.
- Reader 20:** Like Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary and the angels at His birth
our King sings a song to tell us why he came to earth.
- Reader 21:** He came to die upon a cross, thank God that is so true,
but He also came to free us and show us what to do.

- Reader 22:** We follow in His footsteps, a life of mercy living,
telling others of His love; forgiven and forgiving.
- Reader 23:** Listen to your King as He sings His song of love,
and tells exactly why He came to earth from Heaven above.
- Reader 24:** *Read Luke 4:16 -21. (See Production Notes on the last page.)*
- Reader 25:** So God the Father, the heavenly King, saw our lost condition.
Saw our sin and wretchedness and acted in compassion.
- Reader 26:** He sent another King, born in the house of bread,
and through that King's servanthood the whole world could be fed.
- Reader 27:** He saw the lost condition and our harsh and bitter thirst,
and He said come drink from the water of life, from the best of you to the worst.
- Reader 28:** For in God's eyes we all are naked and so lost,
but He'll give us garments of righteousness and never count the cost.
- Reader 29:** To a harsh and cunning master we sold ourselves in slavery
and Jesus came to free us from our wretched poverty.
- Reader 30:** He came that we might live and live abundantly,
and now we, too, can give and now we, too, show mercy.
- Reader 31:** Following in His footsteps we may go down harsh and dangerous roads,
but our King has gone before us and He carries all the load.
- Reader 32:** And He says that as we follow any good things that we do;
even if they are done for strangers, we do them for Him too.
- Reader 33:** We don't do it to earn God's love or buy our way to heaven,
we do it because what we've received can be freely given.
- Reader 34:** We do it because God first loved us and gave us a heavenly King
and our lives can be a love song that graciously we sing.
- Reader 35:** And someday when He comes again from His throne in highest heaven
He will judge us in His righteousness on the mercy we have given.

"THERE'S A SONG IN THE AIR"

(Sung by the children)

Text: Josiah G. Holland, 1819-1881

Music: Karl P. Harrington, 1861-1953

Tune: CHRISTMAS SONG, Meter: 66.66.12 12

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| 1. There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer
and a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire
while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a King! | 3. In the light of that star
lie the ages impearled;
and that song from afar
has swept over the world.
Every hearth is aflame,
and the beautiful sing
in the homes of the nations
that Jesus is King! |
| 2. There's a tumult of joy
o'er the wonderful birth,
for the virgin's sweet boy
is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! the star rains its fire
while the beautiful sing,
for the manger of Bethlehem
cradles a King! | 4. We rejoice in the light,
and we echo the song
that comes down through the night
from the heavenly throng.
Ay! We shout to the lovely
evangel they bring,
and we greet in His cradle
our Savior and King. |

Teacher 1: Okay, I agree that Jesus is the King, and we are the servant and the one being served. I don't like the strange line about heat in the sod that the saint had printed. The servant gets warm by walking in Wenceslaus' steps? What's that all about?

Teacher 2: Let's see what the little ones can tell us. Out of the mouths of babes.

(Young children can be lined up, and some actions can be designed to help them speak the following parts.)

Our King Loves us and wants us to give.

Our King saved us so that we can live.

Our King protects us and gently leads.

In quiet green pastures He kindly feeds.

Walking in His steps each and every day,

We pass all sorts of people all along the way.

People we can help and serve as our King has shown,
And by our love and serving His love to them make known.

Maybe we'll get tired because it's hard work showing love.
Then we are reminded that our King left heaven above.

Maybe we'll get discouraged and think about the cost.
Then we are reminded our King went to the cross.

And it could even happen that our love might grow cold.
Then we need to be encouraged to follow Him so bold.

Sometimes feelings follow actions and our acts can shed some light.
And the light can give some warmth to a world in darkest night.

And that warmth can come alive in our hearts, too,
As we follow in the King's footsteps and do what He wants us to do.

We are strengthened for the job when we remember Baptism water,
And know that merciful washing took us to the Father.

Moms and dads can be strengthened when they come to the Lord's Table.
There they receive Jesus who makes them strong and able.

All of us are stronger when pastor says we're forgiven,
And we can go into the world and speak the joy of heaven.

Following the King's footsteps is not too hard a task,
When we realize that because He died He'll give us all we ask.

He picks us up and carries us when the way is dark and drear,
He leads the way and strengthens us when the way is bright and clear.

Teacher 1: I'm starting to see that it is all about mercy. The manger, the angel's announcement, the shepherds; everything about that birth was about mercy.

Teacher 2: And if you still have questions, maybe this will help. A man by the name of Steven Starke has written words to the tune of "Good King Wenceslas" for our church's LCMS World Relief and Human Care ministry. He based it on the words of Jesus, found in Matthew 25:34-40. (*Read Matt. 25:34-40*).

Reader 36: *Read Matt. 25:34-40. (See Production Notes on the last page.)*

ADDITIONAL STANZAS FOR "GOOD KING WENCESLAS"

(Sung by all)

Text: Stephen P. Starke, 2007

Tune: Good King Wenceslas, Meter: 7 6 7 6 D

Matthew 25:34-40

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|---|---|
| 1. May our Lord soon bring that day
He is yet adjourning
And as Judge to us then say
At His bright returning:
“Come ye, by My Father blest,
Take what you inherit;
Enter heaven’s endless rest,
Made for you to share it. | 3. “I was sick, in need of care,
To My ills you tended;
When I was imprisoned there
You My shame befriended.
This I say assuredly:
What you did for others,
Those good things you did for Me
Through My lowly brothers.” |
| 2. “For you heard My hungry cry
And in love you fed Me;
When My throat was parched and dry,
To a drink you led Me;
I, a stranger, nonetheless
In your home you brought Me;
I, in wretched nakedness
Till you clothing bought Me; | 4. Thus, good Christians, one and all,
Let us with compassion
Heed our gen’rous Master’s call
And in zealous fashion
Labor on, through acts of love,
Tender mercy spreading,
Serve our King who reigns above,
In His footsteps treading. |

Reader 37: Our King left His throne above and came to be a baby,
we celebrate that birth and our King’s great humility.

Reader 38: Now let us humbly bring our gifts to this manger throne,
and contemplate God’s great love as we wend our way toward home.

Reader 39: Bring your offerings forward. Place them in His manger,
and thank God that His sacrifice means you are no more a stranger.

BENEDICTION

Pastor: Through God’s mercy, love, and peace, your sins have been forgiven
and you can live a merciful life, forgiving and forgiven.

CLOSING HYMN - “Silent Night” LSB 363

(While singing the closing hymn, congregants are invited to come before the altar to place their offerings in the manger.)

Production Notes

The setting for the program is the beginning of a Christmas program practice. Skeptical teachers who have some theological and practical questions about the carol "Good King Wenceslas" are slowly convinced by the children that the song, especially with the additional words by Stephen Starke, and Christmas itself are all about mercy.

Children's parts are all in a simple rhyme, which makes them easier to memorize. The Bible verses can be read by older children or teachers.

Only three songs are included in the program: "Good King Wenceslas," "There's a Song in the Air," and "Silent Night." Freedom to choose hymns from the Lutheran Service Book is encouraged, but the hymns should reinforce the Kingship of Christ. Suggested hymns include: "Joy to the World" and "What Child Is This." Another good song, written by Third Day, is "Manger Throne."

Many congregations like to act out the manger scene during or at the end of the program. There is certainly freedom to do so in this format. A good time for the manger scene is during the recitation by the small children.