

Grace Notes in Miniature

Friday, December 18th, 2020

Dear Friends:

I ended last week's GNIM mentioning the Channuka celebration in which I was going to participate; that happened last night and was



beautiful! Each of us, in our own place, lit a candle at the appropriate moment and raised it in front of our Zoom camera at which point Rabbi Wise lit a candle on the Channukiah – or Channuka menorah.¹ All of the songs were posted in English and in phonetic Hebrew so that we could sing along. It was a special time of unity and an opportunity to share our common hopes for peace and joy.

Quite a few faith traditions and cultures have celebrations which focus on light at this time of year – especially those in the northern hemisphere where we shall experience the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, on Monday December 21st. If ever there was a time for us to celebrate – literally or figuratively – with light, this would be one of those times, as many of us are fighting the darkness of stress, depression, isolation and uncertainty. Sites such as Newgrange in Ireland – aligned to sunrise on the winter solstice, and Stonehenge in England – aligned to sunset that day, show that our pre-Christian ancestors recognised the importance of marking the passage of the year and trusting in the return of the light. The Romans celebrated Saturnalia, the Germanic peoples had Yule, and many of our Christmas traditions are appropriated from practices which predated Christianity. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago (see GNIM for Dec 4th) St Lucy's Day used to be tied to the winter solstice in the old (pre-Gregorian) calendar. Christmas trees and the use of candles and lights, holly, ivy, mistletoe, cake shaped like a log (the "bûche de Noël), rounds of shortbread, all are connected to much older light festivals. The very use of red and green for Christmas comes from the colours of the leaves and berries of holly, an evergreen bush whose characteristics have been used as symbols to teach about Christ. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgzgmEJoCSw> Bright red cardinals are associated with Christmas because they do not migrate and they certainly bring a flash of colour to what can be a drab or monochrome landscape.



¹ Note that there are many spellings of this word as we try to use English to express the sounds of the Hebrew words. You may also see Chanukah and chanukiah and variations thereof: the initial sound is similar to the pronunciation of 'ch' in German, "ich" or Scots "loch". I am using the spelling given in the invitation from Shaarei-Beth El (Which I believe means gateway to the House of God)



Perhaps this is a year to investigate some of the traditions of Christmas and introduce some new experiences into your household.

Yesterday was the first of the “countdown days” of the Octave before Christmas, often called the days of the O Antiphons because

of the antiphons which accompany the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, the universal prayer of the Church. These antiphons reflect ancient biblical prophetic imagery of the coming of the Messiah and are sung at Vespers before singing the Magnificat – the Canticle of Mary. During these days, the Gospel acclamations also reflect these antiphons but in a different order.

O Wisdom, O holy Word of God

O sacred Lord of Ancient Israel

O Flower of Jesse’s Stem

O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel

O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light

O King of all the Nations

O Emmanuel, King and Lawgiver



You may recognise these from the beautiful Advent hymn, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, first used in the plainsong of monastic prayer in the 8th or 9th century.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01BcaggibDw>

You may want to pray the O Antiphons from now until the 23rd; here is a site with short prayers which you may find helpful to inspire your meditation:

<https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Advent/O-Antiphons.html>

And finally, some links of Christmas music which you may enjoy as background to your days over the holidays.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0093uRpp11E> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Waf3GFWxjBU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55qtlyxaUW4> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zE-xk_pUK54

I wish you and all those dear to you peace and new joys this Christmas and the hope of a new year of promise. With every blessing,

Gillian

Just for fun! Thanks to Krista Wood at NCDSB for this



A Christmas Musical Quiz (answers are below)

1. Approach everyone who is steadfast.
2. Ecstasy toward the orb.
3. Listen, the foretelling spirits harmonize.
4. Hey, minuscule urban area south of Jerusalem.
5. Quiescent nocturnal period.
6. The autocratic troika originating near the ascent of Apollo.
7. The primary carol.
8. Embellish the corridors.
9. I'm fantasizing concerning a blanched Yuletide.
10. I observed my maternal parent osculating with a corpulent, unshaven male in crimson disguise.
11. During the time ovine caretakers supervised their charges.
12. Virtuous royal philanthropist.
13. The thing manifested itself at the onset of a transparent day.
14. What offspring abides thus?
15. Removed in a bovine feeding trough.
16. Valentino, the roseate proboscis wapiti.
17. The slight percussionist lad.
18. Father Christmas approaches the metropolis.
19. Seraphim we aurally detected in the stratosphere.
20. The Creator reassures you, lively fellows.

11. While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night	12. Good King Wenceslas	13. It Came Upon a Midnight Clear	14. What Child is This	15. Away in a Manger	16. Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer	17. The Little Drummer Boy	18. Santa Claus is Coming to Town	19. Angels We Have Heard High	20. God Rest You Merry Gentlemen
1. O Come All Ye Faithful	2. Joy to the World	3. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	4. O Little Town of Bethlehem	5. Silent Night	6. We Three Kings	7. The First Noel	8. Deck the Halls	9. I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas	10. I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus