**"GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, REJOICE"**

*"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord"* (Lk. 2.11)

     INTRO.: A song which praises the Lord for the coming of Christ into the world is "Good Christian Men, Rejoice." The text is an anonymous medieval macaronic (that is, mixing two different languages–some is in Latin and some in German) carol. Its origin is sometimes attributed to Heinrich Amandus von Berg Suso, who was born on Mar. 21, 1300, at Constanz, Swabia, the son of a knight who had entered a Dominican monastery.  Entering the Dominican Order at Ulm, Bavaria, when he was eighteen, he studied at the University of Cologen and became a priest. During his youth he took the "Everlasting Wisdom" in the Biblical books of Solomon as the object of his love and in later years organized a Brotherhood of Everlasting Wisdom. His *Horologium sapientiae* was a devotional work that he edited for daily use of the members of this organization. A manuscript of it from the fourteenth century is preserved in the British Museum. Also, Suso belonged to a different organization of mystics called "The Friends of God," who are described as "evangelical witnesses" and did quite a bit of writing. From Suso, there are twelve poems translated by Frances Bevan.

     The authorship of this song remained in deep obscurity until the author Petrich discovered what he felt was strong evidence that it came from Suso, who claimed that one year on the "Angel’s Night," which precedes Michaelmas, he lay ill and experienced a vision of rare, entrancing power in which a host of beautiful, stately angels came in a heavenly dance towards him, took him by the hand, and evoked in him a feeling of having been transported to the awesome and incomprehensible depths of the divine mystery. The leader of the angels is said to have sung a joyous carol of the little Child Jesus which Suso later set down.  Folklore has it that supposedly this transcendent experience made him forget all about his illness and pains and join the angels’ dance. Suso left an autobiography entitled *The Life of Blessed Henry Suso By Himself* before his death at the Dominican monastery in Ulm on Jan. 25, 1365 or 1366. The tune (In Dulce Jubilo), which has been inseparably united with the text, is a fourteenth century German melody.

     The earliest existing form of both text and tune is the *Ms. No. 1035* at Leipzig University, c. 1400. The first published version was that in the *Lutheran Gesangbuch* of Joseph Klug, dated variously from 1529 to 1545, probably in an arrangement by Martin Luther. Several translations into English have been made, one of the first being "Now Sing We, Now Rejoice" by A. T. Russell in the 1851 *Psalms and Hymns*, but the most common one was done by John Mason Neale (1818-1866). More of a paraphrase than an actual translation, it was first published in his 1853 *Carols for Christmastide*. The translation was originally in four stanzas, but the third centers on the Virgin Mary and has been omitted from almost all Protestant hymnbooks. In spite of several attempts, I could not find it.  Neale originally had two extra syllables between the third and fourth lines of each stanza, but our books omit these as well. The modern harmonization of the tune is attributed to W. D. and dated 1918. Among hymnbooks published by members of the Lord’s church during the twentieth century for use in churches of Christ, the song appeared in the 1963 *Christian Hymnal* edited by J. Nelson Slater. Today it is found in the 1986 *Great Songs Revised* edited by Forrest M. McCann.

The song expresses praise and joy at the birth of Jesus Christ.

I. Stanza 1 says that Christ was born
"Good Christian men, rejoice With heart and soul and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today.
Ox and ass before Him bow, And He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!"
(Some hymnbook editors, evidently feeling that "Ox and ass" might be a bit "indelicate" have altered the fourth line to read "man and beast" or "heaven and earth;" interestingly one website where the words were used must have some kind of prohibition against certain words because "Ox and ass" became "Ox and \*\*\*)
 *A. God certainly wants us to give heed to His message about Jesus Christ: Lk. 8.18, Heb. 2.1
 B. One bit of news to which we should certainly give heed is that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem: Matt. 2.1
 C. The "good Christian men" are addressed as if they were actually present (or perhaps transported back in their minds) following the birth of Christ when He was laid in the manger: Lk. 2.6-7*

II. Stanza 2 says that Christ was born for a purpose

"Good Christian men, rejoice With heart and soul and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss: Jesus Christ was born for this.
He has opened heaven’s door, And man is blessed forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!"
*A. Unlike the beasts, man can "hear of endless bliss" because God has set eternity in our hearts: Eccl. 3.11 (newer versions)
 B. This is related to the reason why Jesus was born–He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly: Jn. 10.10
 C. Therefore, He has opened heaven’s door and made it possible to have such a wonderful hope: 1 Pet. 1.3-5*

III. Stanza 3 says that Christ was born to save

"Good Christian men, rejoice With heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save.
Calls you one and calls you all To gain His everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save."

*A. Because Jesus was born, we need not fear death and the grave: Heb. 2.14-15
 B. The reason is that Jesus Christ was born to save us from our sins that bring fear of death: Matt. 1.21, Lk. 19.10, 1 Tim. 1.15
 C. Therefore, He calls us to gain His everlasting hall by the gospel: 2 Thess. 2.14*