

24th December 2020

Reinstated

“Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine.”

Christina Rossetti, Love Came Down at Christmas

This Christmas, in church or at home, in reality or in memory, listening to others or with your participation, at some point you'll have come across the familiar carol, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. This carol first appeared in a 1739 collection, "Hymns and Sacred Poems". The words we commonly use were written by Charles Wesley and adapted by George Whitefield, both founding ministers of Methodism. Wesley's original version, *Hymn for Christmas Day*, was longer than the carol we now sing, and contained these two additional stanzas.

*Come, Desire of Nations, come,
Fix in Us thy humble Home,
Rise the Woman's Conqu'ring Seed,
Bruise in us the Serpent's Head.
Now display thy saving Pow'r,
Ruin'd Nature now restore,
Now in Mystic Union join
Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine.*

*Adam's Likeness, Lord efface,
Stamp thy Image in its Place,
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in thy Love.
Let us Thee, tho' lost, regain
Thee, the Life, the Inner Man:
O! to All Thyself impart,
Form'd in each Believing Heart.*

As well as the verses with you are no doubt familiar, you might like to sing these words over to yourself this Christmas Eve to the tune you know well, which the musician, W H Cummings adapted from Felix Mendelssohn's secular music from *Festgesang* in 1855. And, as you do, give thought to phrases like: "Fix in us thy humble home", "ruined nature now restore" and "reinstate us in thy Love". For here, surely, is the essence of the Christmas narrative. It isn't just about joining the "Herald Angels" in their glorious praise. It's about believing that we can be changed, that in the dwelling places of our lives and loves, we can be restored.

We all need to be "reinstated" in love. Whether we see that Love "coming down at Christmas", in Rossetti's words, putting religious language around it, or whether we believe that the tarnished love in our humanity needs to be healed and restored, the purpose is the same. So let's pause today and ponder for a moment how the gift of love can be found again, right here, and right now – "formed in each believing heart".

A prayer for today

Lord, renew us and restore us, "Thine to ours and ours to Thine". Amen

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