

Christmas for Today's Royal Navy

*(The material below may be used freely;
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The Bidding Prayer (light edit Crimbo version)

Carols:

Good King Wenceslas looked out (Bootneck version)

Once in royal David's city (Light edit ankle-biter version)

We three kings of Orient are (Reduced legend and
sentimentality version)

Once in Judah's least-known city

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Ding dong merrily on high (RN Branches version)

O come all ye faithful. (Light edit RN/RM/Army version)

Readings:

Christmas on Ops (David Donovan)

The shepherds are re-briefed

(Christmas reading; bootneck version)

FRONT LINE

NAVAL CHAPLAINS

The Bidding Prayer

(light edit Crimbo version)

At Crimbo time we delight again to hear the story of the journey to Bethlehem, the song of the angels, the surprise of the shepherds, and their joy as they found Jesus in the manger. But we remember at this season all who are hungry or cold; lest we forget Jesus was born to poverty. We remember all who flee their homes today, in desperate fear; lest we forget Jesus became a refugee. We remember those who are ill, anxious, separated or bereaved lest we forget Jesus felt the pain of life and death. And because we know Jesus was born into our world for our salvation, let us in heart and mind go once again to Bethlehem, to hear the message of the angels and worship afresh the Son of God.

From various sources

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Good King Wenceslas looked out (Bootneck version)

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 'twas harry icers,
when a poor man came in sight, gathering fuel for fires.

'Hither, page, and stand by me, if you know it, telling,
yonder civvy, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?'
'Sir, he lives a good yomp hence, underneath the mountain,
right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes' fountain.'

'Bring me scran and bring me wine, bring me hexi hither:
you and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went together;
through the wild wind's loud lament and the bitter weather.

'Sir, it's harry black out there, and the wind's mahoosive;
fails my heart, I know not how; I've got no more to give.'
'Mark my bootprints well, my page; follow in them boldly:
You shall find the winter's rage chills your blood less coldly.'

In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay even;
Strong to do the will of God in the hope of heaven
Therefore, Shipmates all, be sure, grace and wealth
possessing,
You that now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find blessing.

Once in royal David's city
(Light edit ankle-biter version)

Once in royal David's city,
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where was laid an ankle-biter,
In a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And his shelter was a stable,
And his cradle was a stall:
With the humble, poor, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

For he is our whole life's pattern;
Day by day, like us, he grew;
Learned his trade – the village chippy,
Tears and smiles, like us he knew;
And he cares for all our sadness,
And he shares in all our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love;
For that child so dear and gentle,
Is our Lord in heaven above:
And he leads his people on,
To the place where he is gone.

We three kings of Orient are

(Reduced legend and sentimentality version)

We three kings of Orient? Bosh!
Cardboard crowns is just so much tosh!
Camels probably, gifts certainly
Worth a great deal of dosh

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to the perfect light*

Zoroastrian priest from Iran
Part astronomer, part con-man
Gold I bring to crown Jesus king
then quickly back home I ran

O star of wonder, star of night

How the **** did we know what it meant -
The star that us on our journey sent?
The long way round, but the stable we found
Then back to Iran we went

O star of wonder, star of night

Frankincense for worship we brought
Myrrhh for death that salvation bought
Gifts with meaning, then dodge Herod's scheming
Yomping back home we thought ...

of the ... star of wonder, star of night

Glorious now behold him arise
King and God and sacrifice
Alleluia, alleluia
Earth to heaven replies

O star of wonder, star of night

Once in Judah's least-known city

Once in Judah's least-known city,
Stood a boarding house with back-door shed,
Where an almost single-parent mother
Tried to find her new born son a bed.
Mary's mam and dad went wild
When they heard their daughter had a child.

He brought into earth a sense of heaven,
Lord of none and yet the Lord of all;
and his shelter always was unstable
For his mission was beyond recall.
With the poor, with those least holy,
Christ the King was pleased to live so lowly.

Can he be our youth and childhood's pattern
When we know not how he daily grew?
Was he always little, weak and helpless,
Did he share our joys and problems too?
In our laughter, fun and madness,
Does the Lord of love suspect our gladness?

Not in that uncharted stable
With the village gossips standing by,
But in heaven we shall see him -
Here as much as up above the sky -
If, in love for friend and stranger,
We embrace the contents of the manger.

Away in a manger

Away in a manger,
no bunk for his bed,
the little Lord Jesus
laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky
looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus
asleep on the hay.

The QM is piping,
the baby he shakes,
but little Lord Jesus
no whingeing he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus!
Look down from the sky,
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus;
I ask thee to stay
My oppo for ever,
and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear sailors
in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven,
to live with thee there.

Ding dong merrily on high

Ding dong merrily on high,
in heaven ship's bells are ringing!
Ding dong verily the sky
is riven with Wafu's singing:
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so down below, below,
be stokers' wrenches swungen,
and "Io, io, io!"
by all Jack Dusties sungen:
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Pray you, dutifully sound
your ship's alarms, you dabbers;
may the duty watch be found
not gone hARRY weekenders!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

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O come all ye faithful
(Light edit RN/RM/Army version)

Final verse:

Sing, choirs of angels,
Royal, Jack and Pongoes
Sing all you citizens of heaven above.
Give to our Father glory in the highest;
O come, let us adore Him ...

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Christmas on Ops (David Donovan)

(David is watching a group of children celebrating Christmas, singing hymns in Vietnamese but to traditional tunes.)

“The poignant beauty of the ageless hymn was made even more special by hearing it in such a distant place, sung by such different people.

“I stood alone outside the crowd and watched the celebration of the Nativity. I gradually became aware of the pressure of the pistol on my hip, the tug of the bandolier on my shoulder, and the weight of the rifle in my hand. Armed to the teeth I watched the celebration of the birth of the Prince of Peace. I was not only separated from my family and a world away from my own country, but now I felt estranged from my God. I struggled to control the lump in my throat and fought back the tears that were threatening to roll down my cheeks. A black depression settled upon me, and I felt abandoned and alone.

“Every year when Christmas rolls around again and I hear the first rendition of ‘Silent Night’, I relive that village scene. I always have to stop and fight back the tears that come with the memory. Once again I stand face to face with my own inadequacy, that of my country, even that of mankind, and I wonder that after these thousands of years God still has compassion on us all.”

Source: Once a Warrior King: Memories of an Officer in Vietnam; David Donovan; Cassell. ISBN0-304-36713-3

The shepherds are re-briefed

(Christmas reading; bootneck version)

In the vicinity of grid square VI/IX of the Imperial Roman OS map of Palestine, Royal's ancestors were bivvied out, maintaining a standing patrol over live rations which were not helping the tactical situation by repeatedly going, "Baaa..."

Without any warnings from the sentries, they were immediately in a contact situation with an unidentified angel, whose amazing pyrotechnics completely compromised the shepherd's position. (So mind-blowing was the event that some of them were kakking themselves.)

This angel of the Lord (1st class) said to them, "Stand easy, you lot; you're not in the rattle. In fact, you've proffed: you're going to ping a just-dropped sprog who is not just hoofing - he's the Messiah! You now need to pull poles and crack on. Location: Bethlehem; target indicator: manger in stable; objective: baby wrapped up in lots of old puttees. Bug out, then... Not quick enough; back again: go! Now let's see a bit more urgency when seeking the Lord!"

The shepherds finally wrapped on the flock when the massed bands and choirs of God's heavenly Band Service appeared, singing his praises - and totally wrecking any chance of making a covert withdrawal.

After a quick O group, the shepherds devised plan B: they doubled away to Bethlehem, where they found God's mini-me. And verily it came to pass that Mary and Joseph had every reason to be chuffed to little bits because the baby Jesus was indeed more than hoofing.

"Happy with that!" they all said.

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