

Good King Wenceslas (To Annotate)

(1) Good King Wenceslas looked out

on the Feast of Stephen*,

when the snow lay round about,

deep and crisp and even.

Brightly shown the moon that night,

though the frost was cruel,

when a poor man came in sight,

gathering winter fuel.

(2) “Hither, page, and stand by me.

If thou know it 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.”

(3) “Bring me flesh, and bring me wine.

Bring me pine logs hither.

Thou and I will see him dine

when we bear them thither.”

Page and monarch, forth they went,

forth they went together,

through the rude wind's wild lament

and the bitter weather.

(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.”

(5) In his master's step he trod,

where the snow lay dented.

Heat was in the very sod

which the saint had printed.

Therefore, righteous men, be sure,

wealth or rank possessing,

ye who now will bless the poor,

shall yourselves find blessing!

* The carol is based on the life of the historical Saint Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia (907-935). Lyrics by English hymnwriter, John Mason Neale, published 1853. Tune adapted from a 13th century Spring hymn, Tempus Adest Floridum, first published in 1582.