

----- Through The Years -----

Charles Wesley, like his brother John, was one of the major forces in the early Methodist movement. Unlike John, who had little interest in music, Charles was a writer of many, many hymns. Our United Methodist Hymnal contains dozens of hymns which are, at least in part, composed by Charles.

Charles wrote hymns for Advent and Christmas. This was in contrast to many of his contemporaries who were not so enthusiastic celebrants of these seasons. This was due to the Puritan legacy of many in the eighteenth century who didn't believe in celebrating Christmas.

One of Rev. Charles' most famous hymns celebrates Advent. It is Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus, written in 1744. I'm sure many of you are very familiar with this hymn. It is number 196 in our hymnal. It is also found in the hymnals of Lutheran, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches. While Rev. Charles' lyrics (words) remain today, his original music does not. The music we use now is from a Welsh tune Hyfrydol written by Rowland Pritchard.

The most famous Charles Wesley hymn we sing at Christmas is Hark! The Herald Angels Sing. It is number 240 in our hymnal. Once again, it is the lyrics which Wesley wrote that we sing today. Wesley wrote this in 1734. There were some alterations to his lyrics by Rev. George Whitefield, another early Methodist preacher. The melody we sing to this hymn was written over one hundred years later by the famous composer Felix Mendelssohn. This music comes from the cantata Festgesang which Mendelssohn wrote in 1840 to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the invention of Johann Gutenberg's movable type.

Charles Wesley's contribution to the world of sacred music is immeasurable. He was, by the way, inducted into the Gospel Hall of Fame in 1995. His lyrics celebrating Christ live on after two hundred years.

However you celebrate Christmas during this crazy pandemic year, may you find joy and peace in your lives as we celebrated the birth of our Savior. Merry Christmas to all!

Do you have any MUMC history you would like to share with the congregation? Please send it to:

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