

October 11, 2020

## Notes from the Music Department

One of my favorite things to do is the research into the background of the songs that Brian chooses for our Sunday services. Today's gathering song, "O Come, You Longing Thirsty Souls" is based on the hymn tune "Forest Green," using the words from the book of Isaiah found in the Hebrew Old Testament. The charming melody sounded very familiar so after some preliminary investigation (I asked Danika if she had heard it before) I found out that historically this hymn tune has been used extensively. It even shows up four more times with different lyrics in our *Singing the Living Tradition* hymnal.

All Beautiful the March of Days  
I Sing the Mighty Power of God  
I Saw a Mighty Angel Fly  
and.....  
O Little Town of Bethlehm.

Yes, there are two ways of singing that beloved Christmas carol. In England, the singing of the version based on "Forest Green" is the preferred way to help celebrate the holiday.

"Forest Green" was originally a secular English folk song called "The Ploughboy's Dream." It was harmonized by Ralph Vaughan Williams, a beloved and prolific English composer who had the side job of crafting tunes for use in the Anglican Church. Lyricists who liked the melody and harmonizations could then enter their own words. Is this a popular and time-honored method of developing music for the church? Yes. The hymn tune "Hyfrydol" has been used in the Christian tradition as "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," and "Alleluia! Sing to Jesus" among others. In our *Singing the Living Tradition* it appears as "Hail the Glorious Golden City," "Years Are Coming", and "Earth Was Given as a Garden." Peter Mayer brilliantly transformed it into "Blue Boat Home" in the teal *Singing the Journey*. You may remember that some surveys find his rendition to be the number one favorite within the UU community.

'Till we meet again - enjoy!