

Woke Christmas Carols

Long before the Woke movement, the Church has focused on waking up in Advent. Wake up to the facts: Jesus came first to redeem us. He comes in Word and Sacrament to meet you today. He will come again to judge the quick and the dead. For centuries we've been woke. But surely this text bothers some of you as it has me. Is perpetually being awake, also known as insomnia, proscribed here? But what about all 10 Virgins, foolish and wise, sleeping? What about all 3 disciples sleeping at the Transfiguration and in Gethsemane? Woke Carols might help.

How about "Wake up Little Suzie"? It's a 1957 Everly Brothers hit that now sounds quaint. But even when I heard it in the 60s, the crises they sung about rang true. Suzie and her boyfriend fall asleep at the drive-in movie: The guy wakes up in crisis mode: "The movie wasn't so hot, it didn't have much of a plot/ We fell asleep, our goose is cooked, our reputation is shot/ Wake up little Susie." The song was banned in Boston because the lyrics implied the couple spent the night together (songfacts.com).

Even before this song, the Church has been concerned with staying awake. Read church history. You'll find many named Gregory or Vigilantius. The Greek word for watching, staying awake is *grēgoreō* and in Latin it's *vigilate*. It comes from the verb "to be roused from sleep." Everyone has fallen asleep without intending to. It's startling, frightening. Christians named their children "stay awake" and 16 Popes took the name 'Watch' because as Pv. 6:10-11 says, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man." But it's not poverty and scarcity that we stay awake to avoid but judgment. "Wake up little Suzie" or more than your goose is cooked.

But note carefully what Jesus emphasizes about the days of Noah when hostile giants ruled, the faithful intermarried with the unfaithful, and it was all very wicked. He doesn't emphasize the wickedness and immorality but the unwillingness to be woke. How ironic. We're persecuted as being backward, hateful, racist for not being woke to the social media acceptance of LGBTQ and abortion. But the warning here is not being woke to the impending judgment of God on unbelief, immorality, and sinfulness. And not the judgment coming on others but you. Most sleep on occupying themselves with eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Yes, it's a painful time to be a Christian in the world, but you know that has always been the case. What's different now is that many claiming the name Christian accept the Woke agenda *in toto*. Whole denominations have accepted gay marriage, gender is your choice, and killing the unborn. Such world-wide bankruptcy makes us want to sing with Eddie Arnold: "Make the world go away. Get it off of my shoulders." Lots of folks feel this way. Eleven artists have recorded it over 52 years.

Well, one day it will go away. Lock, stock, barrel it will be gone like an incoming wave leaves no trace of your sandcastle. It doesn't appear that way now, so people hold tightly on to it. We've seen kids put everything on making a team, getting this job, going to that school, having this date, and we feel bad when their whole world crumbles because what they attached everything to failed. Live in glass houses don't throw stones. Don't hang fragile, valuable ornaments on thin strings. But we do. The world that is so heavy we want it to go away we, nevertheless, attach much to it. When the Lord finally does make the world go away, every thing and one attached to it goes with it.

Let us be like St. Paul instead. He counted everything he might have gained in this world as 'refuse'. That's being polite. KJV has "dung". It's from a Greek compound word that has 'dog' in it. It's what is thrown to the dogs, offscourings, rubbish, or animal excrement. Most translate refuse, rubbish, garbage, or sewer trash. Only The Message paraphrase has "dog dung." Who would forfeit their soul to gain dog dung? Who would think dog dung to be a heavy burden on their shoulders? It's disgusting not heavy. Yes, you want *that* world of dog do-do to go away, and you certainly don't attach anything to it. Not self, not soul, no life.

"Wake up little Susie, the judgment of the world that is heavy on your shoulders is soon to fall and your Lord Jesus will make this world go away. So, live on Tulsa time. "Living on Tulsa Time" was a 1978 hit by Don Williams. It's about a guy who intends to go to Arizona or maybe California but in the ends decides he's made for the slower Tulsa time. Times do differ. "The times they are a changing." The question is what time are you living in? How do you count it?

WWII generation counted it – and I use this term advisedly – religiously according to January 1st. They were big on New Year’s services. Growing up we had them on Eve and Day even as Trinity did when I got here. In Michigan, they stopped in the 70s. My father didn’t like that so he got permission to open the church on New Year’s Day for those who wanted to start the year off right, as he would say. But already in 1924, a Lutheran scholar rejected this idea. “The *Church* does not recognize, or rightly know anything of, a *New Year’s Day*: this is foreign to *her* Year and her purpose” (Strodach, *The Church Year*, 50). The Church has never connected January 1st with the beginning of its year. Neither did it recognize a “New Year’s Day” except for Advent Sunday.

But over the years New Year’s Day was ever creeping in on the Circumcision of Jesus which happened 8 days after Christmas. i.e., January 1st. Giving New Year’s importance over Jesus’ circumcision happened before the Reformation, and it drew Luther’s fire. “On this day it is considered necessary to announce and speak of, the New Year, as though there were not enough necessary and salutary things to preach about without this’;” And, Luther goes on: “This day is called the New Year’s Day after the custom [of the church] of Rome – this and other things, which we have received from Rome, we now let pass away. Since, however, the Feast of The Circumcision of Christ has been appointed to this day, it is proper that we preach about *this* today” (Ibid., 53).

I know what you’re thinking: what’s the big deal? You’ll have an inkling if you ever have learned to march in step. You know that getting out of step and being in step are important. The Church in starting their new year with the First Sunday in Advent shows the world that She marches to a different drummer. Those of you who travel across time zones have various tricks to sync up with the time where you’re going. The Church seeks to break the link with the rhythms of this world and it’s calendar by staying tuned to Her own. Science fiction has people or things out of phase with time. They can’t be seen then. Christ and Him Crucified is such a reality. The world at best only sees them in the past, a factoid of history. For the Church they are an ever present reality. Paul said that he preaches, present tense, Christ and Him forever crucified. In celebrating Communion Paul says: “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim (present tense) Christ’s death until He comes.”

Christ and Him crucified, the Real Presence of Him in our space and time though invisible to the world is visible to us in this Bread that is His Body and in this Wine that is His Blood. And in these sin, death, and the devil are out of phase. They roar, demand, threaten and appear to win outside of Christ and Him crucified, outside of His Body and Blood, but that’s not the phase we live in; that’s not our time zone, that’s not the beat of our drummer. Sin, Death, and Devil call the cadence outside of Jesus. Outside of His holy life lived in your place; outside of His guilty, damned death, died in your place, their beat goes on, but not in here. Not wherever Christ is by Word and Sacrament. Your Baptism covers you like Teflon: sins don’t stick to you. Absolution declares for Jesus’ sake that you and your sins are not in the same time zone. And Holy Communion crowds out Sins, Deaths, and even Devils by filling your mouth with Jesus and this space and time with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven.

This heavenly reality is out of phase with this fallen, fading away world, but Jesus has reset all our watches by redeeming us. He takes us out of step with the world where we were marching lock step, double time into the grave. He has reset our watches not to Tulsa time, but to Eternity, and rather than march we can skip through these evil days. Wake up to the fact He has made the world go away by taking it off your shoulders and putting it on His. The Eternal has stepped into time in the womb of the Virgin Mary sanctifying time as His own. We don’t date things A.D. in the year of the Lord for nothing. They belong to Him. This and every other year, are His

Our world praises most things that hark back to simpler times. Food less processed, beef not grain fed, chickens who eat grass. All the food that the WWII generation considered poor is now in. It’s responsible, sustainable, healthy eating. Just about whatever the world does old school is revered: except the Church. We’re out of step with the world, but we’re in step with our Lord. And that makes us different, and we can live with that, but does that mean living as insomniacs? Are we to be perpetually awake or risk not being woke for Jesus? Jesus says, “Understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.” Literally Jesus says that if the owner had known once and for all by revelation what time a thief would come, he would have stayed up and prevented the break in. Our Lord has not revealed to us when He will return. The answer is not to stay up for nights on end, but to be woke to the truth that this world is going away any day and a new day has come and is coming in Jesus. We get in step with this truth each Advent when our clocks are reset to His time. Amen

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