



Dear Friends,

One of my favorite Christmas Carols is not a Christmas Carol at all, but rather the celebration of kindness that took place on December 26, Boxing Day or The Feast of St. Stephen. "Good King Wenceslas" is a Christmas carol that tells a story of a Bohemian king going on a journey and braving harsh winter weather so that he could give alms to a poor peasant on the Feast of Stephen (December 26, the Second Day of Christmas). During the journey, his page is about to give up the struggle against the cold weather but is enabled to continue by following the king's footprints, step for step, through the deep snow. The legend is based on the life of the historical Saint Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia, or Svatý Václav in Czech (907–935).

In 1853, English hymnwriter John Mason Neale wrote the "Wenceslas" lyric, in collaboration with his music editor Thomas Helmore.

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 the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

"Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st 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."

"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;
Thro' the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

"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."

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourself find blessing.

Interestingly, Wenceslas, a Duke, was made a king posthumously (many years after his brother had him killed at the age of 24). Legend has him rising every night from his noble bed, with bare feet and only one chamberlain. He went around to God's churches and gave alms generously to widows, orphans, those in prison and afflicted by every difficulty, so much so that he was considered, not a prince, but the father of all the wretched.

This church has followed this tradition in its own way, by taking a Christmas offering for special causes each year. This year we will split the offering between the Anchor of Hope in Haiti and H.E.L.P. Ministries here in Ludington. Please give generously to these causes this year. I promise not to make anyone walk barefoot in the snow; and you will help make some needy person's life a little bit better through your gift. Thank you so very much.

Pastor Dennis