

The Christmas carol “Good King Wenceslas” is known and sung often: “*Good King Wenceslas looked out / on the Feast of Stephen / When the snow lay 'round about / deep and crisp and even.*” What is less well known is the story behind the carol.

The carol is based on the life of the historical Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia (907–935). Wenceslas is credited with bringing Christianity to his people in what is known now as the Czech Republic. His father, a believer, died when he was 13 and he was raised by his godly grandmother. She taught him that faith has to be put into action. Because of her teaching and example, Wenceslas learned true concern for the poor and suffering.

His grandmother became regent of the kingdom since Wenceslas was so young. His mother was a non-believer and jealously wanted that control, so she had Wenceslas' grandmother killed. Wenceslas did not wait to come of age but seized the throne from his mother. He banished her to a neighboring country. During his short reign, Wenceslas encouraged German missionaries to bring the gospel to Bohemia.

Wenceslas had a younger brother, Boleslav, who some called Boleslav the Cruel. Boleslav plotting to overthrow Wenceslas murdered him on the steps of a church. While he was only a Duke during his lifetime, Wenceslas was posthumously given the title of king by Holy Roman Emperor Otto I.

The words to the carol were written in 1853 by English hymn writer John Mason Neale. While not a traditional carol it has stayed a favorite of many. The tune for the carol is much older – it's a 13th-century tune called ‘Tempus adest floridum’. The carol was written for the Feast of St. Stephen, better known as Boxing Day celebrating the long tradition of giving on the Second Day of Christmas.

Neale tried to capture Wenceslas' concern for the poor and suffering when he wrote his carol. The prince goes out on a cold night to feed a poor man who is gathering winter fuel. When a page complains of the cold and difficulty, Good King Wenceslas urges him to follow in his tracks – a mirror of the way we follow in Christ's footsteps. The last phrases of the carol are a reminder to us all.

*Therefore, Christian men, be sure / Wealth or rank possessing / Ye, who now will bless the poor / Shall yourselves find blessing.*

Thank you for your kind and gracious support. May you find many blessings as you focus on Christ this Christmas.

*Ken & Tina*