

“Angels from the Realms of Glory”

This Christmas carol written by James Montgomery was first printed in his newspaper the *Sheffield Iris* on Christmas Eve 1816. The song only really became popular and began to be sung in churches after its 1825 reprinting in the Montgomery collection. It was one of the few carols at the time of a religious character, as in those days most of them focused on eating and drinking and other pleasurable pursuits. Within a few years the first publication of many now-classic English carols, *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (1833), had appeared, which contributed to the mid-Victorian revival of the Christmas song.

In the United Kingdom this carol is usually sung to the tune of the French carol "Les anges dans nos campagnes," which is also known as "Iris," after Montgomery's newspaper. In the United States the song is today most commonly sung to the tune of "Regent Square" by Henry Smart.

James Montgomery (1771-1854) was an interesting character. Born to an Ayrshire clergyman in 1771, he initially failed school, became an apprentice baker before settling in Sheffield in March 1792 as clerk to Joseph Gales on the radical *Sheffield Register* newspaper. On July 4th 1794 he launched and edited the *Sheffield Iris* and was twice imprisoned in 1795 for the seditious writings in his paper in praise of the French Revolution and the following year for the coverage of a local riot. After 31 years as editor, Montgomery retired in 1825 and dedicated his life to producing religious verse. In total he produced over four hundred hymns including "For Ever with the Lord" and "Hail to the Lord's Anointed."