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O Come, All Ye Faithful

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Every week, Steve starts out his piano lesson by playing “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” He began lessons at the start of third grade, and a few months later, during the Christmas season, he latched on to the carol and never stopped playing it. At first, it was just because he could. When students have just started music lessons and their repertoire is limited, playing something familiar is comforting and reassuring. Playing a song that a student knows well is a statement: “I can play the piano! I am not wasting my time!” After Christmas, Steve continued to play “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” regularly delivering the message that not only did he remember how to play the song, but also that he could now play it from memory. Next, Steve seemed to challenge himself with “How out-of-the-world fast can I play this song?” I know an auctioneer in my town who speaks so fast that it leaves my jaw dropped in wonder when I hear him work. However, if the auctioneer and Steve were paired up to race, Steve would leave him behind in the dust.

All of Steve’s goals for his favorite Christmas carol seemed to be accomplished. So why does Steve *still* begin each weekly lesson (an entire year later) playing “O Come, All Ye Faithful?” The answer is simply that it has become a habit, a ritual. We must begin our lesson time together with the ritual. It does not feel right or complete until that has happened. There is a little more to the ritual than just playing the song: Steve plays and I sing. Sometimes Steve also sings. He might be standing while he plays or he might choose to sit. The posture and the participation vary from week to week, but the thing that never changes is the *joy!* We both smile and have fun. Usually I will clap or add a little “bravo!” at the end—a reward for his good effort. If we do not start with “our song” and instead jump into exercises or bookwork, we miss why we are together in the first place: to experience joy.

“Our song” could have been “We Three Kings,” “Silent Night,” “Joy to the World,” or any number of others (since he learned an entire book of songs that December). However, I am really glad that Steve magnetized himself to “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” since this particular carol is one of *adoration*. About six months into our ritual, while singing away, it hit me: we always start with adoration. We trained ourselves to do it over a period of a few months, and now it just happens automatically. So what would happen if when I first woke up—before I got out of bed—I started my day with adoration to my God and Lord?