

[YULETIDE CARRELLS]

Perhaps only those who are monolingual would ask the question, “What language did Jesus speak?” Those many in the world who are bilingual or multilingual would accept unhesitatingly any indication that he knew the Aramaic of Galilee, Hebrew as the language of the Synagogue, and Greek as the *lingua franca* of the eastern Roman empire. Nevertheless we may accept that Aramaic was the language in which he first told his stories and composed his poetry. It is probably right to sense that it was the language in which he felt most at home and which was most immediate to him.

Incarnation is about God in immediate and intimate contact with the human. It makes sense to celebrate it in a first language or dialect, a language of intimacy. Most Scots speakers are used to code switching and so entirely happy to sing in English. Nevertheless it is a disadvantage, perhaps even a theological disadvantage if theology has anything to do with emotion and feel, always to sing in language that you would be unlikely to use with loved ones, immediate family or close friends. For Scots speakers, then, of whatever dialect, there is point in singing Christmas in that language.

Dialects vary, and people are welcome to change a word here and there in what appears below – provided they don't lose the rhythm, rhyme or assonance! It should always, however, be remembered that a healthy living language or dialect is at ease with introducing words new to it from elsewhere, often while giving them its own particular pronunciation.

There are some 10 Scots language carols for Yule to Uphalieday in the Worship in Scots section of the Church of Scotland website:

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/54055/Kirks_Ear_Carols.pdf

At the editor's request, I offer three more.

Traditional carols, like other folk songs, often come in various versions. Amongst other variation, 'The Joys of Mary' comes sometimes with seven, sometimes with ten verses. There is no reason why in its folk migration it should not also develop a Scots version. The basic tune is at Church Hymnary, 4th edition, no. 340, a harmonisation by Terry at the Shorter New Oxford Book of Carols no. 75, and a singer will soon accomplish the slight adjustment to the setting required to accommodate the number count at the end of the second line of each stanza.

Seiven Joys o Mary

O sicna jo our Mary hed,
 It wis her jo – *yin* –
Tae beir her first born, Jesus,
An soukle God's ain Son;
An soukle God's ain Son, guid fowk,
 An blissit lat him be.
Sing Faither, Son an Halie Gaist,
 Til aa eternitie.

The neist guid jo our Mary hed,
 It wis her jo – *twa* –
Tae see her ain son Jesus
The lame gar daunce awà;
The lame gar daunce awà, guid fowk,

An blissit lat him be.

The neist guid jo our Mary hed,
It wis her jo – *three* –
Tae hae her ain son Jesus
Tae gar the blin tae see;
Tae gar the blin tae see, guid fowk,
An blissit lat him be. ...

The neist guid jo our Mary hed,
It wis her jo – *fower* –
Tae hae her ain son Jesus
Tae read the Guid Buik ower;
Tae read the Guid Buik ower, guid fowk,
An blissit lat him be. ...

The neist guid jo our Mary hed,
It wis her jo – *five* –
Tae hae her ain son Jesus
Tae heize the deid alive;
Tae heize the deid alive, guid fowk,
An blissit lat him be. ...

The neist guid jo our Mary hed,
It wis her jo – *six* –
Tae hae her ain son Jesus
Tae beir the crucifix;
Tae beir the crucifix, guid fowk,
An blissit lat him be. ...

The neist guid jo our Mary hed,
It wis her jo – *seiven* –
Tae hae her ain son Jesus
Enthronit heich in heiven;
Enthronit heich in heiven, guid fowk,
An blissit lat him be. ...

The second carol pays tribute to the work of Robert Stephen, referencing some of the lines of his ballad 'The Journey of the Magi' in 'By the Shores o' Galilee'. It is in a different dialect from his. It is in common meter, so there might be a tune local to you that would suit nicely. Otherwise, try 'Culross' or perhaps 'Stilt' (York).

The Journay

The muirland air wus snell an clair,
The sterrs tae, clair an bricht,
Bot nane mair bricht nor thonder ster
Ou'd falla'd monie a nicht.

Fur monie nichts an monie myles
It led ou iver on;
An aye the forder til the wast,

The brichter aye it shune.

Throwe lownd an storm it spurt huz on,
Owre craggie muntains bare,
Throwe wuded pass, bi girsie holm,
Owre waitters wide and fair.

This nicht his ster bleezed brichter yet
Whan aa around wis mirk;
Ou falla'd it tae Bethlehem
Past ghestlie souchen birk.

It stappit stieve abuin the inn –
Ae unca, wunnrous thing;
An lowpin down, an comin ben,
Ou'v fund our pap-bairn King.

Thirdly, my first primary school teacher was German, Frau Gibb. I have never forgotten seeing her Christmas tree bedecked with real apples, real oranges and real candles. We children were given one of the miraculous fruits off the tree. This is the traditional carol of the tree:

O Tannenbaum, o Tennenbaum, wie grün sind deine Blätter!
O Tannenbaum, o Tennenbaum, wie grün sind deine Blätter!
Du grünst nicht nur zur Sommerzeit
nein, auch im Winter, wenn es schneit.
O Tannenbaum, o Tennenbaum, wie grün sind deine Blätter!

And here is a carol built on it. The tune is at the Shorter New Oxford Book of Carols no. 102:

O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, what green your growthie grains ar!
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, what green your growthie grains ar!
Ye'r green no juist i simmer time,
bot als throwe winter snaws an rime.
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, what green your growthie grains ar!

O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, sic fruit your grains is bouin!
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, sic fruit your grains is bouin!
Ye'r beiran blithmeat at Christ's birth,
a glisk o glorie on the yirth.
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, sic fruit your grains is bouin!

O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, sic licht frae you is leamin!
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, sic licht frae you is leamin!
Ye'r like yon buss at Moses saa
at lowit an wis nane the waur.
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, sic licht frae you is leamin!

O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, your growthie grains ar green ey!
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, your growthie grains ar green ey!
The Lord wis thair, the Lord is here,
his hirsels' meat, his hirsels' cheer.
O sperklin spruce, o sperklin spruce, your growthie grains ar green ey!

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robert Mackenzie was ordained in 1976 while an assistant in Hamilton. His minister father was from Falkirk. He himself grew up in Berwickshire and west Fife. One of his charges was in Angus. In two charges north and west of the Highland boundary fault he found that some natives used elements of distinctly Scots vocabulary. For a time he edited the Worship in Scots pages for the Church of Scotland website when he felt much privileged to work with the late Revd David Ogston who was noted for writing distinguished liturgical material, including in Scots.