

The
Church Year *in*
Limericks

Volume 2

Christopher M. Brunelle


MorningStar
MUSIC PUBLISHERS A division of
ECS Publishing Group

MorningStar Music Publishers, Inc.
1727 Larkin Williams Road, Saint Louis, Missouri 63026-2024
morningstarmusic.com

© 2021 by MorningStar Music Publishers, Inc.
All rights reserved. Published 2021

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, mechanical, electronic, recording, photocopying or otherwise, anywhere in the world, including public performance for profit, without the prior written permission of the above publisher of this book.

ISBN 978-0-944529-81-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017903760

To Thalia, the dog in the doggerel

Introduction

Life is rhythm, and rhythm never stops. Even the national and global upheavals of the past few years have not suppressed the fundamental cycle of the seasons or the underlying patterns of our lives. The pandemic has closed many churches, but the work of the church continues; many choral lofts are empty, but my choir continues to meet and sing, albeit remotely, every week. And every week brings the comforting rhythm of familiar faces, fresh music, and new limericks.

Like its predecessor, this collection brings together many of the limericks that I have shared with my choir at the start of rehearsal, which I have done for many years as a way to set myself a creative goal and to ensure that there would always be something new for my singers to appreciate (or groan at). The topics cover the gamut of church life, from scripture to worship to music to community service to the health of our nation and our world. The inclusion in this volume of a larger number of limericks with national and global themes simply reflects the unavoidable intensity of our times.

Some may still question the propriety of liturgical limericks. If Thomas Aquinas' Latin limerick (see my introduction to Volume One) fails to convince them, perhaps a more mystical approach will appeal. As the eighteenth-century theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (*Arcana Coelestia*, section 5291) put it, "in the spiritual world all numbers signify real things," and "the number five holds within it a heavenly secret." Like the five smooth stones that David chose before his battle with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40), or the five prudent and five foolish virgins of the parable (Matt. 25:1-13), so the five lines of the limerick surely correspond to a higher truth, which will undoubtedly become clear to those who rise beyond the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2-4) to the fifth.

Aficionados of the first volume who pay attention to style might notice a greater preponderance in the second of what might be considered far-flung rhythms and rhymes. I hasten to assure the careful reader that the essential triple rhythm of the genre is rigorously maintained throughout this collection, even as it is put to increasingly unexpected use. As a rule,

limericks rely on rhymes of one syllable (*crowd* and *loud*, or *avoid* and *Freud*) or two syllables (*nervous* and *service*, or *living* and *forgiving*); here you will find not just a good number of three-syllable rhymes (*miracle* and *empirical*, or *Deuteronomy* and *bonhomie*) but even a few four-syllable combinations (*secularize* and—well, I’ll leave it to you to find out).

In search of variety, many careful writers also steer away from identical rhymes, which occur when the rhymed vowel is preceded by the same consonant: *late* and *relate*, for example, or *monocle* and *demonical*. But with the right emphasis a fault can become a style, and in this collection I have intentionally included a few *triple* identical rhymes, making the first, second, and fifth line of a limerick all end with the same sound. I have done this partly because the effect underlines the theological point of the poem and partly because the trinity of *oxhide*, *oxide*, and *ox-eyed* is too good to ignore.

But do my rhymes really rhyme? Beauty, one might say, is in the ear of the beholder, and perhaps not everyone agrees that *literal*, *Presbyteral*, and *profiterole* all belong in the same poem. In my defense I can only say that *roof* rhymes with *hoof*, and those who think otherwise now have a chance to extend the same aural generosity that I do to everyone who rhymes *roof* with *proof*. (You know who you are.)

I am grateful to the English language for the gift of the neutral unstressed vowel, like the *a* in *about* or the first *i* in *medicine*. Linguists refer to this sound as a *schwa*, and the fact that it has no real flavor of its own is a great help to those of us who want to let *Samaritan* and *keratin* play together. Read these poems out loud (as you should), and if you don’t get too stressed about those unstressed syllables, you too can enjoy a real sense of *schwa de vivre*.

Let me finish with a plea for moderation. In his sixth-century guide for monastic life, Saint Benedict speaks with approval of earlier Christians who read the entire psalter every day. With all due respect for our ancestors in the faith, I will encourage a more leisurely, even haphazard, approach and suggest that these verses will be best appreciated a few at a time, more in the manner of *Bartlett’s Quotations* than IKEA instructions. If you want to experience them as my choir has done, try them at the rate of two every week—and if you want to experience the ones I haven’t yet written, come join my choir.

Christopher Brunelle, February 2021

Prologue

Like God's Testaments—old and yet new—
This book is both timeless and true,
 A Mosaic mosaic
 That blends the Judaic
And Christian. Enjoy Volume 2!

Advent

The Advent of Advent

Thanksgiving has gone, there's no doubt.
Leaves have left, and few birds are about.
 So much has departed;
 What's soon to be started?
Let's go to church and find out.

Drop Down, Ye Heavens, from Above

No Advent is ever complete
Without gifts that God's sure to repeat,
 And our spirits all burn
 For the truth we'll soon learn:
Is it snow? Is it slush? Is it sleet?

Holy Calories

Christ's Advent brings parties and mirth
As well as some gains in our girth—
 So eat cookies each day;
 The more that we weigh,
The less we must wait for his birth.

Christmas

Christ's Musical Entourage

If shepherds surrounding a boy
And cattle as small as a toy
 And kings made of clay
 All holler 'Hooray',
You'll hear a crèche-endo of joy.

Luke 2:1-5, Caesar Augustus, and Federal Spending

Dear government, don't make me frown!
You brought Joseph and Mary to town
 To be put on your lists;
 Christmas exists
From the fact that you *didn't* shut down.

In Praise of Christmas and Christmas Carols

Christ has been born. Mary's nursing.
Joseph is tired. Herod's cursing—
 And the angels refuse
 To stay silent: "Good News!"
Is the song that they're gladly dispersing.

Epiphany

Strange Gifts

Okay, gold—but then *myrrh*, and then *frankincense*?
Just how low do these royal gifts rank in sense?
 Were two kings just deranged?
 Were their presents exchanged
For small coins, to be brought to the bank in cents?

Late January: Onward

Any carol of Christmas now numbs;
The Epiphany cake is now crumbs.
 It's just winter. God bless!
 With faith we progress
And give thanks for the season that comes.

January in Minnesota

Thank God for fresh snow! Yet I flinch
At the weights that my shovel must winch.
 For our state, I demand
 A new motto: The Land
Of Ten Thousand Flakes Per Square Inch.

Lent

Lent and Etymology ('incinerate' = 'turn to ash')

Oh, the apple that Adam, that sinner, ate!
From the outset it gave to his sin a rate
 Of such pride and such passion
 That soon he turned ashen—
And that's why in Lent we incinerate.

Ash Wednesday on February 14

Love and ashes? There's nothing that hinders
The enjoyment of Valentine cinders:
 On the day that Lent starts,
 We apply to our hearts
Divine fuels, airs, matches, and tinders.

Lookin' Good, Christian

I can prove, by my rhymed homiletics,
The deep link between ash and aesthetics:
 The smudge on our face
 Is our blush at what's base—
That's the beauty of Lenten cosmetics.

Easter

Happy Easter!

That death is a fact seems empirical,
And grim news leaves us grimly satirical—
 But Christ's risen, and hence
 It's *life* that makes sense
As the great and unstoppable miracle.

Happy Easter on the First Day of April

April fools many folks with its tricks—
Now it's winter; now spring; now a mix—
 But *God's* jokes are boss:
 Death sticks Christ on a cross,
Then from death Christ recrosses the Styx.

Happy Easter! (Try It out Loud)

In vinegar tablets dissolved,
And the mystery of Easter was solved.
 The equation is true:
 Christ died; we did too!
(But in *our* case, some eggs were involved.)