

# TTT 392. Balance Tradition and Innovation

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## Teaching Tip 392 | “How to Prepare Christmas Lessons. Part 4 - Balance Tradition and Innovation” | Malcolm Cox

The story of the birth of Jesus is well-known. How do we keep it fresh when we preach and teach about it? That's what this series is all about. Last week, we discussed engaging the imagination. This week, in our final recording on this topic, we discuss balancing tradition while at the same time being innovative.

Let me offer you two ideas.

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### 1. Honour tradition

Use familiar carols, readings, or Advent themes. I was stunned a few years ago when I read meditatively the words of the carol "Good King Wenceslaus". I had been singing the carol for 60 years, yet missed its core message. I have attached the lyrics below. What do you think it's about? How many people do you think understand that carol at Christmas? So many wonderful scriptural themes abound in the song. It would be easy to prepare a lesson based on its message.

You might like to access the [Connecting with Christ through Carols](#) series on Douglas Jacoby's YouTube channel. This morning, I listened to Tammy Fleming talking about the carol "The Little Drummer Boy". It gave me new insights into the meaning of the carol's message and a new appreciation for its value.

### 2. Innovate

Experiment with different ways of presenting the Christmas story.

I read Dan Walker's book ['Remarkable People: Extraordinary Stories of Everyday Lives'](#) a few years ago. It includes a unique version of the Nativity story written by a policeman named Liam Kelly. He retells the events as if written in the style of a police report. I used it as the basis of a nativity lesson and found it to be a helpful way of refreshing a familiar story.

Another year, I used a children's version of the nativity story as the heart of the Sunday lesson. I read the story with the children sitting around me. Now and again, I paused to ask the children

and adults questions. Using the children's version not only meant that it was accessible for the young people, but it also helped the adults see the events in a different light.

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## Conclusion

The Christmas season is the time of year when tradition needs to be honoured most. Ignoring tradition reduces the potential for being more deeply enriched by the wisdom of the centuries. However, an over-reliance on tradition may lead to disengagement because your congregation have been there, seen it and bought the T-shirt many times over. Experiments and innovation can be refreshing to the mind and the heart.

What is your best tip for helping speakers prepare inspiring lessons around the Christmas story? Please let me know.

Next time, we will begin our countdown to the new series, beginning in January, focused on top tips for new and inexperienced speakers. By the way, I reckon many of them will be very helpful for those who are longer in the tooth in the speaking realm!

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Please add your comments on this week's topic. We learn best when we learn in community.

Consider joining us at [AIM](https://aim.moodlecloud.com/) UK & Ireland for faith-building teaching:  
<https://aim.moodlecloud.com/>.

Do you have a question about teaching the Bible? Is it theological, technical, or practical? Please send me your questions or suggestions. Here's the email: [malcolm@malcolmcox.org](mailto:malcolm@malcolmcox.org).

If you'd like a copy of my free eBook on spiritual disciplines, "How God grows His people", sign up at my website: <http://www.malcolmcox.org>.

Please pass the link on, subscribe, and leave a review.

Keep calm and carry on teaching.

God bless, Malcolm

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### Good King Wenceslas (Tempus Adest Floridum)

Verse 1

Good King Wenceslas looked out  
On the feast of Stephen  
When the snow lay round about  
Deep and crisp and even

Brightly shone the moon that night  
Though the frost was cruel  
When a poor man came in sight  
Gath'ring winter fuel

Verse 2

Hither page and stand by me  
If thou know'st it telling  
Yonder peasant who is he  
Where and what his dwelling  
Sire he lives a good league hence  
Underneath the mountain  
Right against the forest fence  
By Saint Agnes' fountain

Verse 3

Bring me flesh and bring me wine  
Bring me pine logs hither  
Thou and I will see him dine  
When we bear them thither  
Page and monarch forth they went  
Forth they went together  
Through the rude wind's wild lament  
And the bitter weather

Verse 4

Sire the night is darker now  
And the wind blows stronger  
Fails my heart I know not how  
I can go no longer  
Mark my footsteps good my page  
Tread thou in them boldly  
Thou shalt find the winter's rage  
Freeze thy blood less coldly

Verse 5

In his master's steps he trod  
Where the snow laid dinted  
Heat was in the very sod  
Which the Saint had printed  
Therefore Christian men be sure  
Wealth or rank possessing

Ye who now will bless the poor  
Shall yourselves find blessing

John Mason Neale, Unknown

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