

Go Tell It on the Mountain

**By
Bill Dagle**

For most of us, life has taught that it is the little things that matter most and stay with us for years to come. In particular, at Christmas time, these memories seem to become more precious as the years go by.

So it was for John W. Work III as he recalled Christmas experiences as a child. He remembered that early each Christmas morning, around five o'clock, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, directed by his father, walked around the campus of Fisk University in Nashville, singing Christmas songs. Their favorites were "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and "Glory to that Newborn King." After the early morning singing, the students and faculty gathered in the dining hall for a Christmas service and breakfast amid glowing candles and decorated tables. Like young John, Christmas memories are the best; and the music makes them all the more vivid for us today.

John's father, John Wesley Work II, was a teacher at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, at the turn of the twentieth century. He taught Latin and history, but his real love was music. As a matter of fact, it was music that saved the University from bankruptcy. The school had been founded in 1866 by a northerner, Civil War General Clinton B. Fisk. Working through the Freedmen's Bureau and the American Missionary Association, Fisk hoped to educate young people "irrespective of color." Because of this, the school quickly became known as a black school and relied on the good will of philanthropists; but by 1871, the school was nearly bankrupt. To save the school, the group known as the Jubilee Singers was organized—"four half-clothed black boys and five girl-women...sang across the land and across the sea...bringing back \$150,000." They saved Fisk and, equally important, introduced the sounds of black music to the world.

In 1907, Professor Work II continued the tradition started years before by publishing a small booklet, "Folk Songs of the American Negro." Included in this songbook was a new piece of music. The author had heard a refrain for which he shaped a melody, harmonized a tune and added some original stanzas. Because no copyright was registered, Work lost all claim to this song; but yet, the message and the memories still live on in his Christmas song, "Go Tell It on the Mountain." When you think of the true meaning of Christmas, that is all that matters anyway.

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

**Go, tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere;
Go, tell it on the mountains that Jesus Christ is born!
While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night,
Behold throughout the heavens there shone a holy light.**

**The shepherds feared and trembled when lo! Above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth.**

**Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
And brought us God's salvation that blessed Christmas morn.**

