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## Carols with a Story

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Christmas 1947 was approaching. In a students' hall of residence in Madrid, Spain, St Josemaria suggested to some young men in Opus Dei to compose or choose some

popular carols they could sing in family get-togethers. Some of the carols that arose out of that suggestion are now available in Spanish (with an English translation) on this website: *“O donkey, you give him your love”*, *“The ox said to the mule”*, *“I’m just a donkey”*, *“Traveling carol”*, *“Mother, there's a Child at the door”* and *“Show him to me now”* .

The idea of writing songs and carols was taken up by people in Opus Dei in other countries, and verses and tunes began to be sent to St Josemaria from around the world. At one point several carols in different languages were put together to the same tune: *“Traveling carol”*.

The carols had very simple words that helped people to enter into the Christmas scenes, and led them to pray. As Don Alvaro recalled, “St Augustine said that to sing is to pray

twice. I'd add that to sing as a family is to feel twice as much of a family."

The words and tunes reflect one of St Josemaria's ideas: "to practise the simple piety of children, based on the solid doctrine of theologians." The repeated references to the ox and the donkey, for example, point to the Pope's teaching: "The ox and the donkey are not a mere product of pious imagination, but have become the companions of the Christmas event in virtue of the faith of the Church in the unity between the Old and New Testament. Isaiah 1:3 says: 'The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand.' The Fathers of the Church saw these words as a prophecy announcing the new people of God, the Church formed of Jews and gentiles. In God's eyes all men, Jews and pagans alike, were like oxen and donkeys, without

reason or understanding. But the Child in the manger opened their eyes to understand the voice of their master, the voice of their Lord.” (Joseph Ratzinger, Christmas homilies)

Christmas 1974 was the last Christmas St Josemaria would spend on earth. On New Year’s Eve he spent some time with his sons. They brought him a figure of the Child Jesus – God and Man. He took it in his hands with loving care and was not embarrassed to treat it, as he said, “childishly”. He recalled the figure of Baby Jesus from St Elizabeth’s Convent in Madrid, which he had rocked and sung to. Now, looking tenderly at the little figure of Jesus, he covered it with kisses and confessed to his sons, “I’m not ashamed to kiss Baby Jesus like when I was little. Now that I’m on the point of leaving this world, I’m not at all ashamed to do it.”

## **Words and music in pdf format\*:**

- O Donkey you give him your love  
(with translation)
- The ox complained to the donkey  
(with translation)
- Show him to me now (with translation)
- I'm just a donkey (with translation)
- Traveling carol (to be added shortly)

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