

Niños Christmas 2022



Assorted
memories
and
appreciations
from
Niños
Melissa,
Tom,
Joe,
Diana,
and
Lynn



In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air,
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.



*Christina Rossetti, by
Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

Christina Rossetti, "In the Bleak Midwinter", 1872

“In the Bleak Midwinter A Heart”

I have often been struck by these last verses of Christina Rossetti's beautiful poem, turned into a hymn by Gustav Holst and others, - what can I give him? What I can give him... my heart.

It seems so simple. Perhaps so simple as to be almost corny in these busy times of gifting and greetings and joy. But just like Christina's story itself, it is anything but simple. She was born to a lively, educated family of Italian descent living in London during a time of great intellectual companionship amongst many artists and writers. But she lived with underlying pain. Seeing her father experience physical hardships that lost him his job and financial stability. Seeing her family have to go seeking different ways to make a living- some natural such as teaching and some that worried her, such as when her sister became a governess. She faced inner demons with her own mental health struggles and even around the time she wrote this poem, in her forties, she was facing a diagnosis of Grave's disease.

I can imagine her, almost poured out herself, bringing her humble presence to God. God, I can't make you anything special this year. And I can imagine God speaking to her, saying, I want only your heart.

And that is everything! Everything is in giving God our hearts.

This Christmas, may we let go of the perfect. May we come to God ever so humbly with all our brokenness and on bended knee, humbly offer our hearts. May God work in each of us gently, gently, to inspire us for this next year. To share our heart, to give our heart to God. Nothing more is needed.

Melissa Campbell-Langdell

My Favorite Christmas song – by Tom Allbaugh

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Adonai, Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



Jerusalem, late 19th century

Here is the full Christmas carol as we know it today, one I have always found to be haunting, pleading, searching in a night of darkness. It has captured for me much of what the Christmas season—and advent itself—has come to mean in the most biblical sense: humankind seeking and calling for the help of “God with us” in a time of darkness and captivity.

Some of what we know of the history of how this song came to take its current form helps me to understand how it has such resonance and depth. An anonymous writer on the Classic FM website traces the many “arcane words and expressions” in the song to its roots in ancient Latin texts of the song as an “O Antiphon,” that is, as a series of songs first chanted in the medieval church and composed to begin with “O.”

The melody for the song we now know was traced by musicologist Mary Berry to 15th century French texts. The composer is anonymous, and in its present form and melody, first written in Latin as “Venti, venti Emmanuel,” was found and translated in 1851 by John Mason Neale, and this is more or less the form we have for it today (From <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/occasions/christmas/lyrics-o-come-o-come-emmanuel-origins/>).

You'll Go Down in History

By Joseph Bentz

I know there are many more spiritually significant Christmas songs and poems than “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” but when I think of a Christmas work that has meant a lot to me, this is the main one that comes to mind. I have known the song for as long as I can remember. But even more importantly for me, when I was a kid, I looked forward to seeing the “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” TV special every year. I don’t think I ever missed it. It was a family event, especially in the days before you could record it and had to watch it during the one hour a year that it actually came on. I loved the stop-motion animation and the characters who were part of it in addition to Rudolph—Yukon Cornelius, Hermey (who wants to be a dentist), Boss Elf, the Abominable Snow Monster, the Toys on the Island of Misfit Toys, and others. It was one of my favorite hours of the Christmas season.

Many years later, when our own kids came along, they also fell in love with the show and with the song. We watched it together each year, and Jacob in particular loved to sing it repeatedly. During one Christmas season, when he was about 4 or 5 years old, he would start singing it almost any time of the day or night—when he was riding in the car, or playing, or getting ready for bed. My parents visited from Indiana that year, and they would stop their conversation to hear him sing it every time. Someone also gave us the “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer Game,” which is a trivia game based on the TV show. We have played it repeatedly over the years. Rudolph is inspiring. He learned that the thing that made him different—and that caused the other reindeer make fun of him—ultimately became his most important strength. How would Santa have made it through the fog without him?

“Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer”

By Johnny Marks

You know Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen
Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitzen
But do you recall
The most famous reindeer of all?

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
Had a very shiny nose
And if you ever saw it
You would even say it glows

All of the other reindeer
Used to laugh and call him names
They never let poor Rudolph
Join in any reindeer games

Then one foggy Christmas Eve
Santa came to say
"Rudolph, with your nose so bright
Won't you guide my sleigh tonight?"

Then how the reindeer loved him
As they shouted out with glee
"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
You'll go down in history."



Journey to Bethlehem

Diana Glyer

Many Christian households decorate their homes with nativity scenes at Christmastime: Mary and Joseph gather around a manger; baby Jesus rests in the hay; an ox and a donkey stand nearby while an angel perches precariously on the roof of the wooden stall. When my daughter Sierra was small, she received a simple creche from her grandmother. It isn't fancy or fragile; it's sturdy and simple, with chunky wooden pieces tactile, indestructible, and perfectly suited for a child's small hands.

But I have always felt that the nativity isn't so much a scene as it is a story. So our Advent tradition is to arrange the pieces as a narrative. Day by day, the story unfolds as the characters assemble and move step by step through our living room, from the bookcase to the mantel, from Nazareth toward Bethlehem.

***“Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky, look down where He lay:
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.”***

“Away in a Manger,” William J. Kirkpatrick and James R. Murray (1882)

SETTING UP THE STABLE

We pull the nativity pieces out of the Christmas box on the first Sunday of Advent. And the first thing we do is set up the stable on the mantel above the fireplace. In our case, the stable is constructed of two thin pieces of wood hinged at the top. Simple, humble, open to the elements, this flimsy wooden structure reminds us how lowly and basic the resting place of the Holy Family really was. Jesus left the glories of heaven to lay down his head in a simple shelter, vulnerable from the start to whatever dangers might arrive from weather, darkness, the curious, the cruel, or the careless.





***“From God our Heavenly Father,
A blessed Angel came,
And unto certain Shepherds
Brought tidings of the same:
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by Name.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
comfort and joy.
O tidings of comfort and joy!”***
 “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” (1650)

ARRANGING THE SHEPHERDS

The stable is set up on the right side of the mantel; the shepherds and their sheep are gathered on the left. I like that our nativity set includes two white sheep and one black sheep. That black sheep reminds me that we are all outcasts and misfits and yet we, too, have a part to play in this grand story. No matter who we are or what we have done, we, too, are invited to come by the heavenly choirs to come and see Jesus.

***“I am a carpenter, not a wise man, not a king
And yet, the angel told me in a dream,
The Virgin Mary soon will bear a Son called Jesus
Take her hand - I'll take her hand***

***(Behold!) And He shall be called Emmanuel!
King of Kings! The Holy Child is born!
I'll lead my family through Israel
We'll build a home. We'll help Him grow.”***

“I Am a Carpenter--Joseph's Song,” Cherolyn Klosner Lane (2004)

PLACING MARY AND JOSEPH

The stable and the shepherds are set on the mantel, above the fireplace on the east wall of our long living room. Next, we put the small, wooden figures of Mary and Joseph at the far end of the bookcase that runs the length of the room's south wall. This is where the storytelling begins. Day by day, we move these small figures closer and closer to the stable, closer and closer to the little

wooden manger. When Sierra was little, it was one of the first things she wanted to do every morning: "Can I move them? Can I move them closer?" And so, bit by bit, morning by morning, the Holy Family makes their way to Bethlehem.

***"For Christ is born of Mary,
And, gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth."***

"O, Little Town of Bethlehem," Phillips Brooks and Lewis Redner (1868)



ON CHRISTMAS EVE



In my household growing up, we celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve rather than Christmas morning. Dinner, then church, then driving home slowly to admire Christmas lights. At home, the little wooden figures of Mary and Joseph finish their journey across the long bookcase to the far side of the mantel and arrive at the small grey stable. Baby Jesus and his manger would be added to the scene (fetched from their hiding place in the back of the bookcase), and an angel would be added on a bookshelf right above them. Then the shepherd and sheep would arrive to greet the newborn king. And after that? It's time to open presents.

***“There shone a star above three kings
To guide them to the King of Kings.
They held you in their humble arms
And knelt before you until dawn.
They gave you myrrh; they gave you gold, and
Frankincense, and gifts untold.
They traveled far these gifts to bring
And kneel before their newborn King.”***

“Christ Child Lullaby,” Father Ranald Rankin (1855)

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE WISE MEN?

In my family, Christmas begins in Advent, and it does not end on Christmas day. We do not celebrate the twelve days of Christmas, but we do celebrate Epiphany, also known as Theophany, or Three Kings' Day. Three kings have been placed on the eastern-most end of the living room. And now that Christ is born, the kings begin their journey. They travel along the same long bookcase that Mary and Joseph had journeyed, They will arrive at the creche on January 6th. Epiphany. And we will mark the day by wearing paper crowns and ordering food from our favorite Mediterranean restaurant!



Meaningful Christmas Associations

When the theme for this Niños Christmas book was decided, I called "*dibs*" on Christina Rossetti's *In The Bleak Midwinter* ...but Melissa Campbell-Langdell wasn't at that meeting and so I laughed upon opening the very first contribution to the book and seeing her selection!

When it comes to meaningful Christmas associations, beyond the intangible (the sense of wonder I got from sitting by the Christmas tree in an otherwise dark room, smelling the pine, awash in glowing lights and colors and shiny ornaments), a very specific tangible memory is the first time I heard *The Little Drummer Boy*: I was probably about ten years old, I was in the recently remodeled kitchen of our home, and I had to stop and listen to the whole song. It may have been the Bing Crosby recording (which makes sense; it was released in 1962 when I was ten) or perhaps the 1958 recording by the Harry Simeone Chorale, but I was struck by the subtly dramatic way the recording built, almost reminiscent of Ravel's *Bolero*, and very aware, at that young age, that I had no gift fit to give a king, and the idea that I could play my drum for Him (pre-guitar, I played piano) was wonderful, and the line, "I played my best for Him," moved me tremendously. I know a lot of people roll their eyes at this song, but I still connect with that initial response and it remains a 20th century favorite.

When it comes to *In The Bleak Midwinter*, part of what compels me in that beautiful song is the awareness of our poverty, our inability to give the Lord any *thing* of value. It goes beyond the reality that a person of wealth could provide a kingly gift (consider how useful the gifts of the Magi were, particularly the gold, when the Holy Family had to flee from Herod and sojourned in Egypt for some years) — but Yeshua, although born of humble human origins, nonetheless held claim to every material thing in the universe, and I daresay that YHWH could provide whatever was needed by any number of interesting and even amusing interactions along the way — remember Jesus sending Peter to catch a fish to pay the Temple tax for the two of them?!

These two songs, in their own different ways, present the same dilemma: I am poor, I can offer no kingly gift, what can I possibly give to honor this newborn King who so clearly deserves our honor?

If we cannot give Him any *thing* of value, Rossetti really does hit the nail on the head: what can I give Him? I can give Him my heart. My trust, my devotion, my praise, my talent, the core of my very being. And, in doing that, I acknowledge and complete my part of the transaction which He set in motion, on Golgotha, in Judea, nearly two thousand years ago, according to our experience of linear time.

I am not my own; I have been bought with a price, by His precious perfect blood.

Lynn Maudlin

Bing Crosby's *The Little Drummer Boy*: <https://youtu.be/NrOZW0Soxus>

Harry Simeone Chorale version: https://youtu.be/oR_Rb9A7ImM