

Christmas Hymns

By Bob Young

[Note: for a number of years, around the Christmas holidays I have included in my writings and blogs various hymns or carols related to the birth of Jesus. I have generally called attention to hymns that are less well known, focusing especially on the messages conveyed by unfamiliar words. This article brings together information from various articles and blogs and makes the information available in one article. I plan to update this article periodically, adding more carols. —by]

Introduction

I am part of a religious tradition historically known (in general) for its opposition to celebrating December 25 as the birthday of Christ. That preference, at times a strong doctrinal stance, has at least two results. First, we are not familiar with the wonderful variety of Nativity hymnody which exists. Second, in many churches we only sing the more familiar songs and carols which we do know at times other than the Christmas season. I would add that many of my “tribe” know more secular Christmas songs than spiritual Christmas hymns.

As a former music major, I share for your enjoyment during the Holiday Season various carols or portions of carols, some longer and some shorter, some only excerpts. These samples suggest the rich depth of the Christmas carols that exist. Many of these carols will be unfamiliar. May God bless your life with an increased awareness of the significance of the Incarnation—that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!

Day One

What babe new born is this that in a manger cries?
Near on her lowly bed his happy mother lies.
Oh, see the air is shaken with white and heavenly wings –
This is the Lord of all the earth, this is the King of Kings.
--Richard Watson Gilder, A Christmas Hymn (st. 4)

Day Two

This is the month, and this the happy morn,
Wherein the Son of Heaven’s eternal King,
Of wedded maid and virgin mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring,
For so the holy sages once did sing,
That He our deadly forfeit should release,
and with His Father work us a perpetual peace.
--John Milton, Hymn – On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity

Day Three

God rest ye, little children; let nothing you affright,
For Jesus Christ, your Saviour, was born this happy night;
Along the hills of Galilee the white flocks sleeping lay,
When Christ, the Child of Nazareth, was born on Christmas Day.
--Dinah Maria Mulock (used pseudonym, Mrs. Craik), Christmas Carol (st. 2)

Day Four

[Penned by James Montgomery, this Christmas song “Angels from the Realms of Glory” was first published in his Sheffield newspaper on the Christmas Eve of 1816. Later, it was republished in the Christian Psalmist, 1825 with some additions. Isaac Gregory Smith wrote another version of this Christmas carol in 1855. Henry Smart gave the music to this song and it was first played in Psalms and Hymns for Divine Worship in London in 1867.]

v1--Angels, from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye, who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain--Come and worship,
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new-born King.

v2--Shepherds in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing;
Yonder shines the infant Light:

v3--Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar:
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen his natal star:

v4--Saints before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In his temple shall appear:

Day Five

A Child This Day Is Born

[Source: William Sandys, *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (London: Richard Beckley, 1833)]

1. A Child this day is born,
A Child of high renown.
Most worthy of a scepter,
A scepter and a crown.

Refrain

Novels, Novels, Novels,
Novels sing all we may,
Because the King of all kings
Was born this blessed day.

2. The which the holy Prophets
Spake of long time before,
That from the fall of Adam
He should us all restore. **Refrain**

3. This Child both God and Man
From Heaven down to us came,
He is the King of all Kings,
And Jesus is His Name. **Refrain**

4. These tidings Shepherds heard
In field watching their fold,
Was by an Angel unto them
That night reveal'd and told. **Refrain**

5. Who standing near by them
To them shined so bright,
That they amazed were
At that most glorious sight. **Refrain**

6. To whom the Angel spoke,
Saying, Be not afraid,
Be glad, poor silly shepherds;
Why are you so dismayed; **Refrain**

7. For lo, I bring you tidings
Of gladness and of mirth,
Which cometh to all people by
This holy Infant's birth. **Refrain**

8. Him hath God lifted up
As light and shepherd's horn,
Which in the city of David
This present time was born. **Refrain**

9. The only Son of God was he
The Lord and God most Highest;
And he is the true Shepherd,
The young child Jesus Christ. **Refrain**

10. Then there was with the Angel
A Host incontinent
Of heavenly bright soldiers,
Which from the Highest was sent. **Refrain**

11. Lauding the Lord our God,
And his Celestial King;
All Glory be in Paradise,
This heavenly Host did sing. **Refrain**

12. Glory be unto our God,
That sitteth still on high,
With praises and with triumph great,
And joyful melody. **Refrain**

13. But when this holy Army
Of heavenly soldiers bright
Was unto God returned
And vanish'd out of sight; **Refrain**

14. The Shepherds hearts joyful
At this great glorious news
That the King of all Kings
Was risen amongst the Jews. **Refrain**

15. Without the least of hindrance
Anon they went in then,
And found the young child Jesus Christ
Thus born in Bethlehem. **Refrain**

16. And as the Angel told them,
So to them did appear;
They found the young child Jesus Christ
With Mary his Mother dear. **Refrain**

17. Now such a place it was
Where this was come to pass
For want of room this Child was laid
Betwixt an ox and ass. **Refrain**

18. Not sumptuously, but simply
Was this young King arrayed,
A manger was the cradle
Where this young Child was laid. **Refrain**

19. No pride at all was found
In this most holy Child,
But He being void of all sin
The Lamb of God most mild. **Refrain**

20. His body unto bitter pains
He gave to set us free:
He is our Saviour Jesus Christ
And none but only He. **Refrain**

21. To Father, Son and Holy Ghost
All glory be therefore,
To whom be all dominion
Both now and evermore. **Refrain**

Day Six

This New Christmas Carol

[Source: William Sandys, Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern (London: Richard Beckley, 1833)]

1. This new Christmas carol
Let us chearfully sing,
To the honor and glory
Of our Heavenly King,
Who was born of a Virgin,
Blessed Mary by name,
For poor sinners' redemption
To the world here he came.
2. The mighty Jehovah
By the prophets foretold,
That the sweet babe of Heaven
Mortal eyes should behold.
Both King, Prince, and Prophet
Nay, our Saviour beside,
Let his name through all ages
Ever be glorified.
3. Now, when Joseph and Mary
Was espoused, we find,
Having seen her condition,
He was grieved in mind
Aye, and thought to dismiss her
Whom he loved so dear;
But an Angel from Heaven
Did her innocence clear.
4. He declared in a vision,
That a Son she should have.
By the Father appointed
Fallen mortals to save;
And the same should be called
Blessed Jesus by name:
From the high court of Heaven
This ambassador came.
5. Then the righteous man Joseph
He believed the news,
And the sweet Virgin Mary
He did no wise refuse.
Thus the blest amongst women,
She did bear and bring forth
A sweet Prince of Salvation
Both in Heaven and Earth.

6. When the days of her travail
Did begin to draw nigh,
Righteous Joseph and Mary
They immediately
To the city of David,
To be taxed indeed,
E'en as Caesar Augustus
Had firmly decreed.

7. Being coming to the city,
Entertainment they craved,
But the inns were so filled
They no lodging could have;
For the birth of our Saviour,
Tho' he was Prince of all,
He could have there no place
But a poor oxen stall.

8. Now the proud may come hither,
And perfectly see
The most excellent pattern
Of humility;
For instead of a cradle,
Deckt with ornaments gay,
Here the great King of Glory
In a manger he lay.

9. As the Shepherds were feeding
Of their flocks in the field,
The sweet birth of our Saviour
Unto them was reveal'd,
By blest Angels of Glory,
Who those tidings did bring,
And directed the Shepherds
To their Heavenly King.

10. When the Wise Men discover'd
This bright heavenly Star,
Then with gold and rich spices
Straight they came from afar,
In obedience to worship
With a heavenly mind,
Knowing that he was born
For the good of mankind.

11. Let us learn of those sages,
Who were wise, to obey;
Nay, we find through all ages
They have honour'd this day,
Ever since our Redeemer's

Bless'd nativity,
Who was born of a Virgin
To set sinners free.

[Note: Days Seven-Ten: The songs which are presented on days 7-10 include lyrics by Timothy Dudley-Smith, an Anglican bishop who writes one new Christmas carol a year, are particularly high quality. Dudley-Smith is a biographer and former associate of John Stott. All of these are copyright in the US by Hope Publishing Company.]

Day Seven

Secret Birth

Child of the stable's secret birth
The Lord by right of the lords of earth
Let angels sing of a king newborn
The world is weaving a crown of thorn
A crown of thorn for that infant head
Cradled soft in a manger bed.
Infant hands in a mother's hand,
For none but Mary can understand
Whose are the hands and the fingers curled
But his who fashioned and made our world:
And through those hands in the hour of death
Nails shall strike to the wood beneath.

Day Eight

Holy Child

Holy Child, what gift of grace
From the Father freely willed!
In your infant form we trace
All God's promises fulfilled.
Holy Child, before whose Name.
Powers of darkness faint and fall;
Conquered, death and sin and shame,
Jesus Christ is Lord of all!

Day Nine

Tell Out, My Soul (based on the Magnificat, Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-55)

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord:
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of his word;
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name:
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;
His holy name, the Lord, the mighty one.

Day Ten

Exult, O Morning Stars Aflame

Exult, O morning stars aflame!
With all the works of God proclaim
The Child of Bethlehem who came
For love and love alone.
Come earth and air and sky and sea,
Bear witness to his deity
Who lived, the Man of Galilee,
For love and love alone.

Day Eleven

"Hark, the herald angels sing, Glory to the new-born king."
Peace on earth, and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled!
Charles Wesley, Christmas Hymn

Conclusion

May your life be blessed as you read and meditate upon the words of these carols.

For those who would have interest in a more detailed study of what the Bible says about the date of Jesus' birth, I include a link to my article on the subject:

<http://www.bobyongresources.com/articles/date-of-jesus-birth.pdf>