

Home Worship, December 27th, 2020 Christmas 1 Christmas Reflections in Story, Poetry and Song



Gathering Words

Welcome to the third day of Christmas- a time to unwrap more gifts: the gift of Christmas music yet to be heard and sung; the gift of stories; the gift of the many meanings of Christmas down through the ages; whatever the gift may be for you in these strangest of Christmases! Welcome!

Carol

Once in Royal David's City

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YX8xHM68qo>

[Alexander/Gauntlett with King's College Choir, Cambridge]

*Once in royal David's city,
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.*

*For He is our child-hood's pattern,
Day by day like us He grew,
He was little, weak, and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us He knew,
And He feeleth for our sadness,
And He shareth in our gladness.*

*He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor and meek and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.*

*Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see Him, but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
When like stars His children crowned,
All in white shall be around.*

*And through all His wondrous childhood,
He would honour and obey,
Love and watch the lowly mother,
In whose gentle arms He lay.
Christian children all should be,
Mild, obedient, good as He.*

Prayer

God of many gifts, we come today knowing that we need gifts beyond what come in the mail, or sit under the Christmas tree. We need nourishment beyond the tastes and textures of holiday feasts. We need light that remains even after Christmas lights are taken down. We need companionship that stays with us through the long nights of winter yet to come. May our minds and hearts be open today to those more enduring gifts, that deeper nourishment, that unfailing love and that constant companionship which are the true reason for Christmas hope. May we be grounded in hope and surprised by joy, today and always. Amen

Carol

Good King Wenceslas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty2GogvrP4c>

[Neale/Piae Cantiones with Michala Petri, recorder and Danish National Vocal Ensemble]

*Good King Wenceslas look'd 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.*

*"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."*

*"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.*

*"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know now 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."*

*In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay 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.*

How the Grinch Stole Christmas” by Dr. Seuss

...So he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear.
And he did hear a sound rising over the snow.
It started in low. Then it started to grow.
But the sound wasn't sad! Why, this sound sounded merry!
It couldn't be so! But it WAS merry! VERY!
He stared down at Whoville! The Grinch popped his eyes!
Then he shook! What he saw was a shocking surprise!
Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,
Was singing! Without any presents at all!
He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!
And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: "How could it be so?"
"It came with out ribbons! It came without tags!"
"It came without packages, boxes or bags!"
And he puzzled three hours, till his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before!
"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store."
"Maybe Christmas...perhaps...means a little bit more!"...



Carol

I See Amid The Winter's Snow

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHwaj5Nb4ss>

[Caswell/Goss, sung by the choristers. Of St Thomas Fifth Avenue, New York

*See, amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see the tender Lamb appears,
promised from eternal years.*

Refrain

*Hail, thou ever-blessed morn!
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.*

*Lo, within a manger lies
he who built the starry skies:
he who, throned in height sublime,
sits amid the cherubim **Refrain***

*Say, ye holy shepherds, say—
what's your joyful news today?
Wherefore have ye left your sheep
on the lonely mountain steep? **Refrain***

*Sacred infant, all divine,
what a tender love was thine,
thus to come from highest bliss
down to such a world as this! **Refrain***

*Teach, O teach us, holy child,
by thy face so meek and mild,
teach us to resemble thee,
in thy sweet humility. **Refrain***

Reading

from John 1 [selected verses]

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. The Word was present to God from the beginning. Through the Word all things came into being and apart from the Word nothing came into being that has come into being. In the Word was life, and that life was humanity's light- a light that shines in the darkness, a Light that the darkness has never overtaken.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light- the true light, which enlightens everyone.

The Word was coming into the world- was win the world- and the world came into being through him. To any who received the Word, who believed in that Name, were empowered to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or human will, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw the Word's glory, the favour and position a parent gives an only child, full of grace and truth.

Special Music

The Coventry Carol

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7qYeZcOiol>

set by Philip Stopford sung by Voces 8

Story of a Modern Christmas Gift:

The Emperor's Gift

[adapted by Jane from Harold Stewart Mills]

It was slow going in the first winter snow
As Harold drove home from Water Street
Where he had been picking up some last-minute Christmas presents.

When he arrived home he noticed lots of lights on, and many cars parked around his house-
And realized,

Oh, no, this was the night of their annual Christmas party when all the neighbours came by -
And he had forgotten all about it, as he dawdled along the street chatting to passing friends.
He crept in - hoping to blend into the scenery.

He didn't blend in very long- immediately someone shouted,
"Here he is! Open it ! Open it!"

And several hands reached out to drag him over to the coffee table - there he saw a huge package.
The guests all gathered round:
"Open it ! Open it!"

Harold looked more closely - the parcel was addressed to him-
In the corner were many beautiful Japanese stamps.

One neighbour said' Harold , please could I have these Japanese stamps for my collection?"
He cut them out carefully and handed them over.

Harold wondered why he was getting a parcel from Japan.

Then he remembered.

" I know! Remember, I taught English in Japan way back when,
And just last year one of my former students was here with his family.
They loved everything about their visit here- and when they left, they said they were going to send us something "

"Open it! Open it!" The guests cried.

Inside the heavy brown paper was a white package, tied with a wide white ribbon.
“What a beautiful silk ribbon! “ said one of the women,” May I hav it please?”

And Harold’s wife Jennifer said, “Be careful unwrapping that, dear. I want the rice paper.”/

As Harold handled the ribbon to the woman who wanted it,
And the rice paper to Jennifer, he said
‘That Japanese student said someone in his family worked for the emperor and could send..’
The sentence went unfinished.

Under the rice paper was a beautiful red lacquered box painted with many lovely scenes.

“What a fine example of Japanese art” someone commented.
“Perhaps you might lend it.to the Ross museum next summer” someone suggested
“Or maybe Sunbury Shores wold enjoy showing it” someone else commented.

And Harold said, “Certainly. I’m sure we could think about that.
But it wasn’t a box the student was going to send.
No, I think it was.... “

“Open it! Open it! “ the guests urged.

Opening the lacquered box, Harold drew out a large roll of beautifully patterned silk.

“ Oh my, how lovely” said Jennifer’ I think there’s enough silk here for some very fine draperies. “

“It wasn’t silk either. : Harold said
“It was something of the Emperor’s.
It was...”

“Be careful how you unroll that.” someone warned.
“There’s a box in it”.

So there was!
A carved ebony box.

Harold stood up straight, holding the box in the air.
He announced”. This box I am keeping for myself.
It isn’t the gift but I know what’s in it.
It’s tea!

The Japanese student said that his uncle who worked for the Emperor of Japan would sent me some of the Emperor’s own very special tea”.

“Opening the box, he showed his guests the inside- which indeed looked very much like tea leaves.

“I’ll make us some Emperor’s tea right now! “ said his son Peter.

When the tea was made and each guest had a cup , they tasted it together, full of expectation.

It was awful.

To be polite, everyone drank it anyway.

Then Jennifer looked into the ebony box once more.
Digging deeper, she uncovered one more thing,
Something buried in the box,
A small exquisite ivory box,
And in the ivory box , tea.

This tea smelled wonderful !
And the tea tasted- well , none f them had ever tasted such excellent tea!

Far off in Japan, the student had told his father about his kind host, his former teacher , in Canada.
When his father told the Emperor he agreed that a gift should be sent .

He asked his chamberlain to deliver some of his own special tea to the student's father.

The chamberlain thought". What an exquisite gift!

I must put it in an exquisite box! " and so he put it in his own beautiful ivory box.

The student's father thought: Such a special gift must be protected carefully.

And so he placed the ivory box in his favourite ebony box and filled up all the empty spaces with dried mulberry leaves.

The student's wife wrapped the ebony box in yards and yards of patterned silk to protect the wonderful gift,

And the student put the bundle of silk in his favourite lacquered box.

And then to be on the safe side his wife wrapped the lacquered box in rice paper and tied it with a white silk ribbon.

And then the student wrapped it in heavy brown paper and took it to the post office .

"This is a special gift from the Emperor"

And so the postmistress picked the most beautiful stamps for the package.

A beautiful package of many charming things

But the essence of the gift, the reason for the gift, was the Emperor's tea.

And so it is with the lovely wrappings we put around the precious gift of Christmas.

Each of us must unwrap the gift for ourselves,

Careful not to mistake the wrappings for the gift.

And yet, the wrappings too can be labours of love,

Given in a generous spirit-

Reflecting the gift at the heart of it all.

Music of Reflection

I wonder as I wander

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whERHDBeygg>

[Appalachian carol collected by John Jacob Niles, sung by Vocore]

**I wonder as I wander out under the sky,
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die.
For poor on'ry people like you and like I...
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.**

**If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing,
A star in the sky, or a bird on the wing,
Or all of God's angels in heav'n for to sing,
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.**

**When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall,
With wise men and farmers and shepherds & all.
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall,
And the promise of ages it then did recall.**

Offering Prayer

Each year we receive the gift of Christmas stories through the ages. May the gifts we offer today make the joy of this season present in the life stories of many, here and around the world. May those of all ages, everywhere, have reason to hope, and give thanks, and sing. May we all grow in wisdom, love and light. In the name of your beloved one. Amen.

Community at Prayer

We give thanks, surprising God, that you give yourself not in the powerful and extraordinary, but in weakness and in the familiar, in a baby, in bread and wine. We give thanks for this gift: at journey's end, a new beginning; set in the poverty of a stable the richest jewel of your love; revealed in one small town your light for all nations.

Thank you for bringing us to Bethlehem, House of Bread, where the empty are filled and the filled are emptied, where the poor find riches and the rich recognize their poverty, where all who kneel and stretch out their hands feast abundantly on your love.

Today we bring before you those among us, those known to us, who feel emptiness and poverty in body or spirit; those who mourn endings; those who long for a new beginning, as we all do in this long pandemic season; those searching for food and shelter; those hungering for love and belonging. In a moment of silence, we hold in Love all those for whom we would pray—May they and may each of us receive the gift of your gentle, strong, unfailing light, new and bright every morning, May we offer ourselves as light and gift to each other, a gift to all your hungry, hurting, beloved world. We pray in the name of your beloved One who teaches his friends to pray: Our Father [or Mother, or Creator]....

Announcements and Joys and Concerns.

Music on Christmas Morning” by Anne Brontë

Music I love - but never strain
Could kindle raptures so divine,
So grief assuage, so conquer pain,
And rouse this pensive heart of mine -
As that we hear on Christmas morn,
Upon the wintry breezes borne.

Though Darkness still her empire keep,
And hours must pass, ere morning break;
From troubled dreams, or slumbers deep,
That music kindly bids us wake:
It calls us, with an angel's voice,
To wake, and worship, and rejoice;

Carol

Hark The Herald Angels Sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xw38pGhPXIk>

[Charles Wesley] with the Celtic Women

***Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King,
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies,
with the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”***

***Christ, by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
Hark the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King!”***

***Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace, hail the Sun of Righteousness,
Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die,
Born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.
Hark the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"***

Blessing

Go forth, open to new ways of seeing and being, ready to grow and deepen in wisdom and compassion, willing to receive the gifts of those of all ages as you give of yourself openly and generously. May the new life glimpsed at Christmas take root and grow within your heart! May you find the light you need to continue the journey in faith, hope and love.

Carol

Ding Dong, Merrily on High

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6J_2tKCwu7Q

[Woodward/Tabourot, with Kings College Choir, Cambridge]

***Ding dong merrily on high. .In heaven the bells are ringing:
Ding dong! verily the sky is riven with angel singing***

Chorus: Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis! Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

***E'en so here below, below Let steeple bells be swungen
And "Io, io, io!" By priest and people sungen Chorus***

***Pray you, dutifully prime Your matin chyme, ye ringers;
May you beautifully rime Your evetime song, ye singers Chorus***

Prayers of the People adapted by Jane from Kate Compston. Other prayers by Jane.Doull