



Hark
THE Glad
Sound



BARRY BOBB



Hark

THE *Glad Sound*

ADVENT MEDITATIONS
ON TWELVE FAMILIAR CAROLS

Introduction

The songs of the Christmas season take a place as treasured texts alongside Scripture and the Church's great writings. Few events in human history have inspired so much art and music as has the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Generations of writers have produced an enduring legacy for today's believers. But the season is so busy that we often skimp on this great Christmas feast. We sing a few carols in our congregation, hear some on the radio and then suddenly it's January!

These devotions encourage us to consider the words of these wonderful songs and the spiritual insights that deepen our Christmas celebration. This music, this gift of the Holy Spirit, has transcended generations to become part of the soundtrack of our lives.

The "Going Deeper" comments at the end of the book offer additional information on each of the songs. If you wish, watch a performance of the song on YouTube or create a playlist of the songs from iTunes.

I pray that you will hear these songs with new ears, read them with new eyes, and sing them with a renewed spirit.

—BARRY BOBB, *AUTHOR*

In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter, 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 midwinter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
 Heav'n and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;
 In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
 The Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for him, whom cherubim, worship night and day,
 Breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay;
 Enough for him, whom angels fall before,
 The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
 Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
 But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
 Worshiped 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 G. ROSSETTI

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now ... As we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved.

ROMANS 8:22-24

What Can I Give Him?

In this beloved Christmas hymn, we may be struck by the poet's description of a cold, snowy nativity scene. After all, Bethlehem's climate is much closer to that of Jacksonville, Florida, than Minneapolis! In this the author follows a literary tradition, begun centuries earlier by John Milton in his poem "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity." The bleak midwinter weather is a portrait of the desolate *spiritual* condition of a depraved world in desperate need of a Savior. Jesus' birth is marked by pure white snow that covers the sin of the world. God, whom neither heaven nor earth can contain, is found among us as a tiny child in this humble setting. Heaven and earth will flee away when this same Child comes again as a triumphant King.

The third and fourth stanzas, with their intimate imagery, are not usually found in modern hymnals. Worshiped in heaven by the heavenly host, the baby Jesus is content with earthly comforts, a mother's caress and the company of farm animals.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, the question surfaces: What is my response to this most amazing moment in human history, this significant event in my own story? The first impulse is to buy something expensive or offer the best of what we own. But Jesus asks for neither. He asks that we love him and that we love others as he loves us—completely, lavishly, without question or conditions.

O God, you see how busy we are with many things. Give us time and quiet to meditate on your Word. Lead us to listen to the One who brings warmth and light to our lives, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HEAR THE SONG: Search the Internet under this title for audio and video presentations of this song by James Taylor, Sarah McLachlan and Chanticleer.

What Child Is This?

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
 On Mary's lap is sleeping?
 Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
 While shepherds watch are keeping?
 This, this is Christ the king,
 Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
 Haste, haste to bring him laud,
 The babe, the son of Mary!

Why lies he in such mean estate
 Where ox and ass are feeding?
 Good Christian, fear; for sinners here
 The silent Word is pleading.
 Nails, spear shall pierce him through,
 The cross be borne for me, for you;
 Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
 The babe, the son of Mary!

So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh;
 Come, peasant, king, to own him.
 The King of kings salvation brings;
 Let loving hearts enthrone him.
 Raise, raise the song on high,
 The virgin sings her lullaby;
 Joy, joy, for Christ is born,
 The babe, the son of Mary!

—WILLIAM C. DIX

*And they went with haste and found Mary and
 Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.*

LUKE 2:16

The Word Made Flesh

William Dix, a manager for an insurance company, first penned these lines in 1865 and put them to the familiar English folk song melody Greensleeves. He poses questions from our common human experience. Parents gaze at their newborn and wonder: “Who are you? What does life hold in store for you?” Joseph and Mary surely wondered at the strange events leading up to this birth. Soon complete strangers gathered at the manger to share in their intimate moment. Our world still wrestles with the fundamental question concerning this baby in the manger: “Who are you?”

“Why are you?” As the shadow of a cross passes over the scene, our wonder shifts to fear—meaning awe and reverence—in the presence of the holy Child. This new life, the Word made flesh, is already one of intercession on our behalf. This fragile baby protects us from sin and death. We are struck by the shabby conditions, “the mean estate,” of his birth and the low social status of those who first see him. All of us, peasants and kings, wise men and prophets, kneel as paupers before the throne of God’s grace, for that is what this manger is.

Peer into the manger and ask, “*Who* are you? *Why* are you?” The answers are for everyone, and for you.

*Ah, Lord, though you created all, how weak you are, so poor and small,
That you should choose to lay your head where lowly cattle lately fed.
And so it pleases you to see this simple truth revealed to me:
That worldly honor, wealth, and might are weak and worthless in your sight.
—Martin Luther, “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”*

HEAR THE SONG: Search the Internet under this title for audio and video presentations of this song by Josh Groban, Faith Hill and Charlotte Church.

The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
 With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame:
 “All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,
 Most highly favored lady.” Gloria!

“For know a blessed mother thou shalt be
 All generations laud and honor thee;
 Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
 Most highly favored lady.” Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
 “To me be as it pleaseth God,” she said.
 “My soul shall laud and magnify God’s holy name.”
 Most highly favored lady, Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
 In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
 And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
 “Most highly favored lady.” Gloria!

—A BASQUE CAROL PARAPHRASED BY
 SABINE BARING-GOULD

*The angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
 and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore
 the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”*

LUKE 1:35

Favored One

This beloved carol, with its lilting, almost haunting melody, is an anonymous 18th-century folk song from the remote Basque region of northern Spain. It tells the familiar—maybe too familiar—story of Gabriel’s appearance to Mary. The text from the Gospel reveals a startling scene. An angel appears to a young Jewish girl! The angel is Gabriel, who, when he appeared to Daniel, caused the prophet to collapse, paralyzed in fear. Gabriel’s greeting troubles Mary: “O favored one.” What sort of greeting is this? She will conceive and bear a child? How can this be? The Spirit of the Most High will “overshadow” her (the same Hebrew word describes God’s presence in the tabernacle). Through the birth of her child, God will be present among his people! Mary humbly bows her head in acceptance: “Let it be to me according to your word.” She magnifies the name of the Lord.

Martin Luther reminds us that the main focus is not Mary’s “low estate,” but rather that God “regarded” her: “True humility does not know that it is humble. If it did, it would be proud from the contemplation of so fine a virtue ... You must not only think and speak of lowliness, but come into it, sink into it, utterly helpless, that God alone may save you ... For this reason we have the Gospel.”

God Most High greets us in Christ, “O favored one!” Hope overshadows us, and with faith in God’s promises we bear Christ’s name throughout the world.

*O holy Child of Bethlehem ... be born in us today ...
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.
—Phillips Brooks, “O Little Town of Bethlehem”*

HEAR THE SONG: Search the Internet under this title for audio and video presentations of this song by Sting, Jars of Clay and Aquabella.



Advent Meditations on Twelve Familiar Carols

BY BARRY BOBB

The glad sounds of beautiful music heralding the coming of Christ have long been a hallmark of the Advent and Christmas season. In this collection of Advent meditations, expert church musician Barry Bobb explores the history and meaning behind twelve familiar carols. Verse after verse, let the message of these wondrous melodies of our salvation in Christ put a joyous song in your heart every season of the year.

THIS BOOK, ALONG WITH MANY OTHER CREATIVE COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE PARISH PRODUCTS, IS AVAILABLE ON [amazonkindle](#) AND [nook](#).

BY BARRY BOBB. FIELD-TESTED AT CARMEL LUTHERAN CHURCH, CARMEL, IN.
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