



December 24, 2023
THE SONGS WE SING AT CHRISTMAS
“In the Bleak Midwinter”
John 1:1-5; Hebrews 4:14-16

About the Song

Poem by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Published in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1872 under the title *A Christmas Carol*

Collected in her famous *Goblin Market, The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (Macmillan, 1875).

Composer Gustav Holst set it to music, including his setting in *The English Hymnal* of 1906

The Masterpiece of the Human Being

“But His mother **only**”

The contrast with the angels (things into which angels long to look: **1 Peter 1:12; Eph 3:10; Hebrews 1:14**)

Against the relentless Gnostic impulse, the final word on the goodness of matter: **Genesis 1:31**

The condescension of Jesus (“phenomenal cosmic powers...itty bitty living space”: *Genie in Aladdin*)

The magnificence of the human vessel: **Psalm 8:5; Psalm 139:13-4**

Inestimable value of every human life

The Three Great Gifts of the Incarnation

One: The intimacy of “bone of my bone”: **Genesis 2:23**

How the holiness of God becomes home

Two: The encouragement of knowing He understands our sufferings and limitations: **Hebrews 4:14-16**

There is no suffering we know that is foreign to Jesus (other than the suffering of regret)

Three: What must be done by humans He can now do: rule the earth, untie the knot of disobedience
'He became what we are so that we might become what he is.' Saint Irenaeus (120/140-200/203)

Give My Heart

Heart as the center of my being, my essential self, my core

Heart as affectionate loyal devotion (“I give you my heart”)

The metaphor of the wedding vow

The invitation for the Bride of Christ to renew her vows at Christmas

Never-married Christina Rossetti's dying words

“I love everybody. If ever I had an enemy, I should hope to meet and welcome that enemy to heaven.”

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;
Heaven 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,
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.

Despite research, much of Rossetti's life is still a riddle. Her journals, letters and poetry were meticulously edited, and some she destroyed during her lifetime. She shied away from the public eye and was extremely introverted and isolated. We know of just three romantic relationships. James Collinson, the most significant, decided after a two-year engagement to enter the priesthood, but later on Rossetti found out that he had rescinded and married another woman. John Brett was a brief love interest resulting in little more than a half-finished painting and the poem 'No, Thank You, John'. Rossetti called off her third and final relationship, with Charles Cayley, due to his agnosticism, which could never compete with her love for God.

But despite her illness, Rossetti's warm outlook, undoubtedly informed by her religious faith, led her to these last words before she died in London on December 29, 1894, eliciting a sense of hope and contentedness: "I love everybody. If ever I had an enemy, I should hope to meet and welcome that enemy to heaven."