

Christmas Poems and Reflections

*A Hymn for Christmas Day*¹

John Byrom

Christians awake, salute the happy morn
Whereon the Saviour of the world was born;
Rise, to adore the Mystery of Love,
Which hosts of angels chanted from above.
With them the joyful tidings first begun
Of God incarnate and the Virgin's Son.
Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
Who heard the angelic herald's voice: 'Behold!
I bring good tidings of a Saviour's birth
To you, and all the nations upon earth;
This day hath God fulfilled his promised word;
This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord:

*Our Longing for a Calmer, Purer, More Centered Life*²

Barbara Brown Taylor

However different our Christmases have been, one longing most people have in common this time of year is the longing for a calmer, purer, more centered life, and the way most people talk about that life usually has a lot of “up” words in it – as in “rising above anxiety,” “keeping our heads above water,” or “lifting our eyes up unto the hills,” as if belonging to God were a matter of being transported to God's presence for as long as possible, to a place like this one where everything is beautiful, and focused, and right. Just like a Christmas card!

[Taking our cue from the nativity] peace was there, and joy, and love – not only in the best of times, but also and especially in the worst of times – because during those times there could be no mistake about who was responsible.

It was God-with-us. Not the God-Up-There somewhere who answers our prayers by lifting us out of our lives, but the God who comes to us in the midst of them – however far from home we are, however less than ideal our circumstances, however much or little our lives reflect the Christmas cards we send. That is where God is born, just there, in any cradle we will offer him, on any pile of straw we will pat together with our hands.

Any of us who have prayed to be transported into God's presence this Christmas will get our wish – only not, perhaps, in the way we had thought. None of heaven's escalators are going up tonight. Everybody up there is coming down tonight, right here, right into our own Bethlehem, bringing us the God who has decided to make his home in our arms.

¹ Oxford Book of Christian Verse, p. 154, 1st 12 lines

² Excerpted from Barbara Brown Taylor, “Past Perfect”, *Home By Another Way*, Crowley Press, Boston, MA, 1999, p. 22, 24

*To Listen, To Look*³

Ann Weems

Is it all sewn up – my life?
Is it at this point so predictable,
 So orderly,
 So neat,
 So arranged,
 So right,
That I don't have time or space
 For listening to the rustle of angels' wings
 Or running to stables to see a baby?
Could this be what he meant when he said
 Listen, those who have ears to hear...
 Look, those who have eyes to see?
O God, give [us] the humbleness of those shepherds
 Who saw in the cold December darkness
 The coming of Light
 The Advent of Love!

*Let the Star of Morning Rise*⁴

Ted Loder

Lord God,
In the deepest night
There rises the star of morning,
 Of birth,
 The herald of a new day you are making,
A day of great joy dawning
 In yet faint shafts
 Of light and love.

I hear whispers of peace in the stillness,
Fresh breezes of promise
 Stirring,
Winter sparrows
 Chirping of life,
A baby's cry
 Of need
 And hope –
 Christmas!

In the darkness I see the light
And find in it comfort,
 Confidence,
 Cause for celebration

For the darkness cannot overcome it;
And I rejoice to nourish it
 In myself,
 In other people,
 In the world
For the sake of him
 In whom it was born
 And shines forever,
 Even Jesus the Christ.

³ Ann Weems, *Kneeling in Bethlehem*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1980, p. 20

⁴ Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace*, Augsburg Books, Minneapolis, MN, 1981, p. 139

*The Work of Christmas*⁵

Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
 To find the lost,
 To heal the broken,
 To feed the hungry,
 To release the prisoner,
 To rebuild the nations,
 To bring peace among brothers [and sisters]
 To make music in the heart.

*Joy and Peace in Believing*⁶

William Cowper

1. Sometimes a light surprises
 The Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord who rises
 With healing on His wings.
When comforts are declining,
 He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining
 To cheer it after rain.

2. In holy contemplation
 We sweetly then pursue
The theme of God's salvation,
 And find it ever new.
Set free from present sorrow,
 We cheerfully can say,
'E'en let th'unknown tomorrow
 Bring with it what it may!

3. It can bring with it nothing
 But He will bear us thro';
Who gives the lilies clothing
 Will clothe His people too.
Beneath the spreading heavens
 No creature but is fed;
And he who feeds the ravens
 Will give His children bread.

4. Though vine, nor fig-tree neither,
 Their wonted fruit should bear,
Tho' all the field should wither,
 Nor flocks, nor herds, be there,
Yet God the same abiding,
 His praise shall tune my voice
For while in him confiding,
 I cannot but rejoice.

⁵ Howard Thurman, *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*, Friends Unite3d Press, Richmond, IN, 1973, p. 28

⁶ Oxford Book of Christian Verse, p. 199