

Christmas Reflections Inspired by *Emmanuel*

by Sarah Brown

With Song Texts and Album Credits

Welcome to Christmas!

In these notes I'd like to share my reflections on these songs as I've worked with them and how God has spoken to me through them. These reflections are sort of a window into who I am and the way God made me: my love for people, histories, theological musings, writing, music... Read them at your leisure. While these are my own personal reflections, I hope they will encourage you to think about what you'll hear and be inspired to want to know more about this Jesus who was born in a stable. If you don't know Him, I'd like to introduce you to Him so you can understand what makes my heart pulse and what has given me purpose in life.

I truly hope God meets *you* in special way through this music. As you listen, I hope you hear these familiar songs in a new way and that you find yourself responding to God as He speaks to you this Christmas. That could mean surrendering your life to him, it could mean giving to the poor and needy, it could mean creating room in your thoughts to reflect on Christ in these next weeks leading up to Christmas, it could mean any number of things. This project is my own response to Him. May God speak to your heart in unique and amazing ways and may you respond to Him according to the way He's designed you!

Peace,

Sarah

Christmas Reflections and Song Texts

1. GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, REJOICE!

Words: Heinrich Suso; translated from Latin to English by John M. Neale.

Music: IN DULCI JUBILO, 14th Century German melody.

Arr. Sarah Brown

May this song welcome you to a season of anticipation and reflection of the joy and hope we have because of Christ's birth!

Good Christian men, rejoice with heart and soul, and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say: News! News! Jesus Christ is born today;
Ox and ass before Him bow; and He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss: Joy! Joy! Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened the heavenly door, and man is blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave: Peace! Peace! Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all, to gain His everlasting hall. Christ was born to save!
Christ was born to save!

2. WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Words: William C. Dix, 1865.

Music: Sarah Brown

Who is this child that we celebrate, anyway? Why did he come? Why is he special? Where was he born and why does it matter? The irony of his entrance, the purpose of his mission and the value of his identity are summed up here in this song. Isn't it strange that he lies in such a crude place if he is the King of creation? At his birth, the silent Word of God pleads with us to understand God's eternal purposes that would be met in Him - that nails and spear would pierce him through...that he would bear the cross for me and you, and pay the penalty for our sin. Hail the Word who was in the beginning, who took on flesh, the Baby, the son of Mary. "This, this is Christ the King, whom Shepherd guard and angels sing." He is the King of Kings and salvation he brings so enthrone him with your love!

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 your praise, the baby, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such crude estate, where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.
Nails and spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the baby, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him your incense, your gold, your myrrh, come peasant, come king to own Him;
He's the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high, the Virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born, the baby, the Son of Mary.

3. WHAT SHALL WE CHILDREN BRING?

Words: Anonymous, in the *Book of Praise for Children*, 1881.

Music: Sarah Brown, 2006

This is a children's hymn from my second album, *I Belong to Jesus*. The children ask, 'what could we possibly bring that would be of value to the King of Kings? We have neither wealth nor wisdom like all the grownups—no incense, gold or myrrh. What could we offer? Ah! We can bring hearts that love him, thankful praise, and even the little duties we have to do each day.' Yes, even the poorest child can bring these. And better are these treasures to offer to the King than richest gifts without them! In fact, Jesus said, "[I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.]"

The wise may bring their learning, the rich may bring their wealth,
And some may bring their greatness, and some bring strength and health;
We, too, would bring our treasures to offer to the King;
We have no wealth or learning: what shall we children bring?

We'll bring him hearts that love him; we'll bring him thankful praise,
And young souls meekly striving to walk in holy ways:
And these shall be the treasures we offer to the King,
And these are gifts that even the poorest child may bring.

We'll bring the little duties we have to do each day;
We'll try our best to please him, at home, at school, at play:
And better are these treasures to offer to the King
Than richest gifts without them; yet these a child may bring.

And better are these treasures to offer to the King
Than richest gifts without them; yet these a child may bring.

4. COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS

Words: Charles Wesley, 1745

Music: Rowland H. Prichard, 1830

What burdens do you carry? Do you live with fear, pain, guilt, suffering? Are you waiting in expectation of something better, for true satisfaction in life? What you have been waiting for, longing for, even unknowingly craving, is found in Jesus! Come and experience his forgiveness and completion.

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free:
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

5. THOU WHO WAST RICH

Words: Frank Houghton, 1934. © OMF International. Used by permission. www.omf.org

Words to verse 3: Tim Brown

Music: Sarah Brown

Here is a brief history of this remarkable hymn. Chip Stam writes: "Serving as Editorial Secretary for the China Inland Mission, Frank Houghton made a trip to China in 1934 to see first-hand the progress of the work. This hymn was written at a particularly difficult time in the history of the missions to China. Missionaries had been captured by the communist Red Army and released in poor health after over a year of suffering. Others had been captured never to be heard from again. In 1934 the young missionaries John and Betty Stam (my great aunt and uncle) were captured in Anhwei and beheaded. The news of these sorrows had reached the mission's headquarters in Shanghai. Though this was a very dangerous time for both the Chinese Christians and the foreign missionaries, Frank Houghton decided he needed to begin a tour through the country to visit various missionary outposts. While traveling over the mountains of Szechwan, the powerful and comforting words of 2 Corinthians 8:9, 'though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor,' were transformed into this beautiful Christmas hymn."

I was drawn to these words because I felt like they captured the essence of what I love so much about Christmas. Namely, that God the Son chose to strip himself of all his divine rights and privileges and become a creature. He put on, like a garment, a nature which he himself had created at the beginning of

time. He was infinite but became finite. He was the King but he was born into a world under the rule of tyrants who thought they were god. He possessed all power in heaven and on earth but he put it all aside for the sake of his Father's purposes for him. He was the leader of his people but he served them with his life. He was perfect, never sinning against God in any way at any time, and yet he **became** sin – the very antithesis of his nature! This awes me! I hope it awes you.

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour, All for love's sake became poor;
Thrones for a manger did surrender, Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour, All for love's sake became poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising, All for love's sake became man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising, Heavenwards by thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising, All for love's sake became man.

Thou who art good beyond all measure, All for love's sake became sin;
Setting aside thine own good pleasure, Died to make us live again.
Thou who art good beyond all measure, All for love's sake became sin.

Thou who art love beyond all telling, Saviour and King, we worship thee.
Emmanuel, within us dwelling, Make us what thou wouldst have us be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling, Saviour and King, we worship thee.

6. GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN

Words & Music: Traditional English
Arr. Sarah Brown; opening music by Sarah Brown

Listen, brothers and sisters, to the story. Let your heart find comfort and rest in the knowledge that the birth of Christ is the beginning of the story that gives us reason to celebrate! There is NO reason for “season’s greetings” if there is no good news. We have so forgotten the purpose of Christmas – to celebrate the birth of Jesus! All other well-wishing is lovely, but totally superfluous and meaningless compared to this knowledge: that the chief problem which lies within the heart of humanity has been solved by the coming of this baby! He was born, he lived, he died and he rose again for victory over sin and death. That is what we celebrate. And yet “this Holy tide of Christmas, all others doth deface!”

God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day;
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.
So don't dismay.

In Bethlehem, in Israel, this blessed Babe was born,
And laid within a manger upon this blessed morn;
But she, his mother Mary, did nothing take in scorn.
From God our heavenly Father a blessed angel came;
And unto certain shepherds brought tidings of the same;
How that in Bethlehem was born the Son of God by name.
O tidings of comfort and joy!

“Fear not, then,” said the angel, “Let nothing you afright
This day is born a Savior of a pure Virgin bright,
To free all those who trust in Him from Satan’s power and might.”
O tidings of comfort and joy!

The shepherds at those tidings rejoiced much in mind,
And left their flocks a-feeding in tempest, storm and wind,
And they went to Bethlehem straightway this blessed Babe to find.
O tidings of comfort and joy!

But when to Bethlehem they came where our dear Savior lay,
They found Him in a manger where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling unto the Lord did pray.
O tidings of comfort and joy!

Now to the Lord sing praises all you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas all others doth deface.
O tidings of comfort and joy!

7. HAIL THE KING!

Words: Joseph S. Cook, 1919.

Music: Sarah Brown

This is also from my second album, *I Belong to Jesus*. Here we come to the stable, the manger, the surrounding fields. Come and see the angels in their glory, the shepherds as they kneel at the feeding trough where Jesus was laid, the wise men as they find the child and offer their gifts. When he arrived, he was a stranger, known only to a few. But since his visit he is no longer a stranger. He is now familiar with us and we now know him and his purpose. The whole earth is full of his glory! Hail the King of Glory!

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger;
There he lay, the undefiled, to the world a stranger.
Such a babe in such a place, can he be the Savior?
Ask the saved of all the race who have found his favor.

Angels sang about his birth, wise men sought and found him;
Heaven's star shone brightly forth glory all around him.
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight, heard the angels singing;
All the plains were lit that night, all the hills were ringing.

Hail the King of glory!

Gentle Mary laid her child lowly in a manger;
He is still the undefiled, but no more a stranger.
Son of God of humble birth, beautiful the story;
Praise his Name in all the earth,

Hail the King, Hail the King of Glory!

8. BRING A TORCH, JEANETTE, ISABELLA

Words & Music: Renaissance Carol (c. 1300's)
Arr. Sarah Brown

Wouldn't you like to have been a visitor to the original Christmas scene? In Europe a tradition was practiced of having a manger scene near the center of villages so that townspeople could make a special visit to honor the Christ child as if they had been at the first Christmas. This French carol developed out of that tradition. In this song, a mother is calling her young daughters to visit the Christ child in an imaginative reenactment. Of course they and all the villagers must come in hushed reverence lest they awaken the beautiful baby. Use your imagination to view the scene in the stable. Perhaps Jeanette and Isabella come from the nearby inn and bring food for the mother and father. And now they sit watching the beautiful baby...

Interestingly, the tune was not written as a sacred hymn but rather a lively dance. I've tried, in my arrangement, to capture both the essence of a lively dance and the gentle, endearing message of the song.

Bring a torch, Jeanette, Isabella! Bring a torch, to the cradle. Run!
It is Jesus, good folk of the village; Christ is born and Mary's calling;
Ah! ah! beautiful is the Mother Ah! ah! beautiful is her Son!

It is wrong when the Child is sleeping It is wrong to talk so loud;
Silence, all, as you gather around. Lest your noise should waken Jesus.
Hush! hush! see how fast He slumbers! Hush! hush! see how fast He sleeps!

Hasten now, good folk of the village; Hasten now the Christ Child to see.
You will find Him asleep in the manger; Quietly come and whisper softly,
Hush! hush! Peacefully now He slumbers. Hush! hush! Peacefully now He sleeps.

Softly to the little stable. Softly for a moment come;
Look and see how charming is Jesus How He is white, His cheeks are rosy!
Hush! hush! see how the Child is sleeping; Hush! hush! see how He smiles in his dreams.

9. SILENT NIGHT

Words: Josef Mohr; Translated by John F. Young
Music: Franz X. Gruber
Arr. Sarah Brown

Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child. Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

10. CHRISTMAS MEDLEY

Arr. Sarah Brown

The First Noel (Traditional English carol, c. 13th C.)

I Saw Three Ships (Traditional)

Away in a Manger (William Kirkpatrick, 1895.)

I Wonder as I Wander (John Jacob Niles, © G. Schirmer, Inc. Used by permission)

What Child is This? (GREENSLEEVES, 16th Century English melody)

11. GOOD KING WENCESLAS

Music: TEMPUS ADEST FLORIDUM, a 13th Century spring carol
Arr. Sarah Brown

This traditional story so well describes the life of someone who follows Christ. As Christ transforms him, he shares his wealth and life with the poor and needy. Jesus gave up all he owned to make us rich. As we follow Christ, like the page followed Good King Wenceslas, may we also give generously to those who are in need. Then we too will find blessing! Though I don't sing the words, here they are for your benefit.

Good King Wenceslas looked 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, gathering 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 him 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 not how, I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good 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.

12. O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

Words: Anon.
Tune: VENI EMMANUEL

Like Israel, who was in exile under the Babylonians, the whole world is captive to a foreign oppressor – Satan. The prophets spoke in the Old Testament that the Messiah would come to ransom His people. Amazingly, the scope of God's purpose was even grander than what the prophets could describe. Jesus came not just to release Israel, but the whole world from Satan's tyranny! He delivers us from sin so we are no longer broken inside. But our journey still takes place in a broken world. So then we find another name for Jesus: Emmanuel – God With Us. For he comes to be **with** us as we go through this broken world.

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depths of Hell Thy people save and give them victory o'er the grave
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

13. KING OF GRIEF

Words: John Ellerton, 1875.
Music: Sarah Brown

Why have I included a song which so painstakingly speaks of the agonizing death of Jesus? Because I feel the Christmas story is not complete without understanding why Christ came. Yes, he came as a baby and the angels were there to proclaim his birth and Mary swaddled him in rags... We know the story. But did he come just to be born a baby and live a good life as an example to us?

The story this hymn tells describes Jesus' purpose in coming to earth. It was not simply to be the best role model that ever lived. Nor was it merely to perform great miracles. His ultimate purpose in coming to earth was to DIE for our sin, as our substitute. "God made him who had *no sin to be sin* for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV) The **wrath** of God Almighty was unleashed and poured out on him who was blameless because he actually became our sin that deserved God's wrath. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:20 NIV). The epitome of that wrath was that Jesus experienced, for the first time in all of his eternal existence, the rejection of God the Father. He faced that rejection so that we would not have to. What is so amazing to me is that Jesus, who is God, **became** sin. This meant he experienced the complete antithesis of his divine nature!

Oh what grace! He came to take **our** place and bear **our** sins upon that tree that we might have LIFE in him, with him and through him.

Throned upon the awful tree, King of Grief I watch with thee.
Darkness veils thine anguished face; None its lines of woe can trace.
None can tell what pangs unknown Hold Thee silent and alone.

Silent through those three dread hours, Wrestling with the evil powers,
Left alone with human sin, Gloom around Thee and within,
Till the appointed time is nigh, Til the Lamb of God may die.

Hark, that cry that peals aloud upward through the whelming cloud!
Thou, the Father's only Son, thou, His own anointed One,
Thou dost ask him "can it be" "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Lord, should fear and anguish roll, darkly o'er my sinful soul,
Thou, who once was thus bereft that thine own might ne'er be left,
Teach me by that bitter cry in the gloom to know thee nigh.

14. HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Words: Charles Wesley, 1739.

Music: Felix Mendelssohn, 1840.

Arr. Sarah Brown

Does any of this story connect with you? How would you respond had you been there that night? How will you respond now that you know why he came? The angels in heaven sang praise to the newly born King that night. He laid his glory aside and died so that you could live. What song will you bring to him?

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 heav'n 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 as man with man to dwell Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings Ris'n with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King!"

Thank you... for coming with me through the most incredible story ever told. Here is what I've been pondering... My heart this Christmas has been reflecting on the amazing significance of God's incarnation. Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us! He left the comforts and privileges of a perfect heavenly dwelling and forsook all of His divine rights and privileges to put on human flesh and become one of us. There is nothing that ought to inspire more awe, worship and adoration than that thought.

He left perfect harmony with the Father and the Holy Spirit and all the glories of heaven and came to identify with us in our humanity. He came to experience the human condition of this broken world, full of pain, sin, misery, frustration, fatigue, treachery and injustice. But here is the reason for hope! Jesus became one of us while still remaining completely God. While on earth, he fulfilled God's perfect law by living a life of flawless obedience in thought, word and action. This is, in fact, the kind of life that God requires from all of us to be in a right relationship with Him. But we fall short: our sin and rebellion have separated us from God because He is Holy and without *any* flaw. So He provided a way to restore our broken relationship by dealing with our sin, guilt and shame that is responsible for the human misery that surrounds us. Death is the only payment that satisfies a perfect and Holy God.

And so in his mercy, God made a way to **transfer** our sin and guilt and shame onto His Son whose death alone would become the perfect sacrifice. His life in place of ours! Oh, what grace! That God would show mercy to us by placing *our* sin on *Jesus*, which meant rejecting his only beloved Son instead of us. Jesus not only died in our place but then rose from the dead on the third day, conquering that great enemy, death. Anyone who believes that God did this will, with Jesus, conquer death too and receive eternal life. This is God's amazing gift to us. It cost God everything but he gives forgiveness and salvation to us freely because of what Jesus did. Christ was born for THIS! This is the real message of Christmas.

So come and meet the perfect one, the sinless one; who was born as a baby, in poverty, living with none of the privileges he was entitled to, unrecognized and un-welcomed by his own people, and eventually despised, betrayed, beaten and crucified. He also has walked in your shoes and has taken your burdens and placed them on himself.... For love's sake!

May he be more real to you this Advent season than ever before as you hear these carols and let their truth feed your soul!

God Bless You,

Sarah

Acknowledgements and Album Credits

Thank you...

Jesus, my savior and my King - for being and doing all the things I've sung about on this album; and for giving me new life, the gift of music, the gift of a family and a husband. I am your servant. May you become the God of many this Christmas through this humble work.

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