

## **ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS VERSE**



**The Road to Bethlehem**

**And you did not know?**

**At the door of Christmas**

**Have you seen the light?**

**Did you see her face?**

**Mary sang. Mary cried**

**My Camel Won't go**

**The gifts of Christ**

**Miracle**

**This Silent Night**

**Will Grass be Greener?**

**Astrapos**

## **The Road to Bethlehem**

The road to Bethlehem is long:  
It reaches back into the mists of time,  
Beyond the making of the world,  
Deep in the mind of God.

The road to Bethlehem is long:  
It winds across a million yesterdays,  
By hills of hope, vales of despair,  
Deep in the hearts of men.

The road to Bethlehem is long:  
Built with the rocks of human faith and love,  
Laid on the promises of God,  
Deep in his written word.

The road from Bethlehem is long:  
It stretches from a cradle to a Cross,  
Into the lives of all who will believe,  
Deep in your heart and mine.

## **And you did not know ?**

"Lor, what a night !", the old innkeeper sighed,  
Emitting a cavernous yawn  
As he wearily stretched his aching limbs,  
And lifted his face to the dawn.

In the courtyard he saw a well known face,  
Lit up by the travellers' fire,  
He paused in his work a moment to stare  
At the man excitedly talking there.

"Hi there, old Ben !" to the shepherd he called,  
Stumbling across sleeping forms,  
"Hello man. They tell me you've seen the light !  
What happened up there on the hills tonight ?

Or was it down here that you saw it all,  
Far away from your bleating sheep ?  
In the bottom of wine pots drained well dry,  
You can see the brightest stars in the sky !"

Ignoring the taverner's caustic wit,  
The old shepherd's eyes grew wide and bright, "Light!  
I saw light. Sure I did. My mates as well.  
Sober as day we were. It's truth I tell.

Such light ! I've never seen the like before.  
It filled the whole night sky it did,  
Blindin', Dazzlin', I knew I weren't asleep.  
We fell on our knees among the sheep.

When we could look again, the light 'ad changed  
To angels. Angels! Everywhere !  
Thousands upon thousands filled the night sky,  
Singing beautiful songs - I tell no lie.

Then one, the angel Gabriel I'm sure,  
Spoke out and said, 'In Bethlehem tonight  
A child's been born. The Christ has come,  
There's peace and joy for everyone.'"

Hardened to travellers' fanciful tales  
The innkeeper laughed aloud and then said,  
"And then you woke to an anthem of bleats,  
And found the angels had turned into sheep ?"

"No, friend, it were no fancy dream we 'ad,"  
The shepherd faced him straight, "For right away  
We went and found it just as he 'ad said,  
Down to the last straw in the manger bed.

The stable place seemed full of light -  
Not what you really see, but sort o' feel -  
A kind of 'appiness inside  
That makes you glow and want to tell the world."

"A stable !" The innkeeper pricked his ears.  
"A child in a manger ? God's Messiah ?  
And you say it happened tonight ?  
Tell me, where and when did you see this sight. ?"

"We found 'im down in YOUR stable, my friend,  
Laid in YOUR manger, asleep on YOUR straw;  
The Christ in YOUR home, and you did not know ?  
Go, see for yourself, go now my friend, go !"



### **At the Door of Christmas**

Here at the door of Christmas,  
I watch the scene again;  
Where shepherds and the wise men  
Pay homage to the King.  
With gifts they honour him  
As Christ, God's only Son.

I want to bring a gift;  
But what have I to give  
To show my gratitude ?  
I make my gift of love -  
It's all he asks of me -  
And in return he gives  
More blessings, and yet more,  
More love, more peace, more joy,  
Until the life of Christ  
Flows freely into mine.

Content to give myself  
In humble, grateful love,  
I ask for one gift more:  
The gift of childlike faith -  
To step inside the door -  
Into the Christmas scene  
Of glory and of peace;  
And worshipping, serve God  
With his own gift of love.

## **Have you seen the light?**

Have you ever seen the first glow of day  
At the distant, rounded edge of the world?  
The bruised and bloodied line where earth meets sky,  
Giving birth to the day's first rays of light?

Or ever seen a crocus at its birth,  
Forcing itself through frosted, snow-flaked ground;  
A fresh green nose sniffing new blades of grass;  
Drawn by the light – its strength – its life?

Perhaps you've seen the wonder in the eyes  
Of a small child before a Christmas tree –  
Wide open to the flickering, coloured lights  
And gifts piled high, exceeding all his dreams.

Then you will understand the thrill of God  
When Christ was born to be Emmanuel –  
God here! With us! – the light of all the world –  
His joy when hearts' doors open to the Light.

## **Did you see her face ?**

*[A couple from the inn at Bethlehem talk together as they return from visiting the place where Jesus has been born.]*

Did you see her face ?  
Did you see the mother's face ?  
All heaven was in her eyes;  
A shining light,  
Radiant and clear,  
Startling the stable shadows.

*YES, I SAW HER FACE;  
I SAW THE MOTHER'S FACE.  
I WATCHED THE CARING FATHER,  
THE CHILD IN THE COT;  
BUT MY EYES WERE DRAWN  
ALWAYS TO THAT RADIANT FACE.*

Did you see her eyes ?  
Did you see the mother's eyes ?  
Wide with a look of wonder,  
As though seeing far  
To another world  
Beyond our sight or knowing ?

*YES, I SAW HER EYES  
I SAW HER LOOK OF WONDER;  
BUT ALSO IN THOSE EYES, FEAR,  
FEAR OF THINGS TO COME.  
I SAW A SORROW  
LIKE CLOUDS ON A SPLENDID DAWN*

Did you see her smile ?  
Did you see the mother's smile ?  
Such pure, trusting innocence;  
Simple childlikeness;  
A regal beauty  
Touched by the Spirit of God ?

*YES, I SAW HER SMILE,  
THOUGH I SAW A WEARY SMILE;  
NOT TIRED TRAVEL WEARINESS,  
NOR FROM PAIN OF BIRTH:  
A RESIGNATION  
OF LOVING OBEDIENCE.*

I'll not forget her:  
That face so strong, so gentle,  
Full of peaceful joyousness  
I'll keep in my mind  
And drawn strength from it  
When shadows gather round me.

*IF THEY COME AGAIN  
PERHAPS WE'LL SEE THAT RADIANT FACE  
MIRRORED IN THE MOTHER'S CHILD;  
THAT LOOK BELONGING  
TO ANOTHER WORLD;  
WORLD OF GLORY AND OF GOD.*





## **Mary Sang. Mary Cried.**

She sang for joy,  
The chosen girl at Nazareth -  
Wide-eyed and wondering;  
Thrilled by the call of God;  
Consumed by love -  
Heart one with Joseph and with God;  
Excited by her trembling faith -  
"God's word shall be my will."  
She wept, the child  
Whom God, not Joseph, chose:  
Wept at village gossip  
Kindly cruel;  
At worldly minds which could not understand;  
Wept for Joseph's sad looks -  
The love he could not fully share.  
Yet she, through tears drew near to God  
Who trusted her,  
Holding her life in loving hands.  
Till weeping watered faith  
And made love grow.  
She sang for joy at Bethlehem  
When Christ was born -  
Heart leaping at the angels' songs;  
Touched by lowly shepherds' adoration;  
Full up at God's provision for her needs;  
Love-filled laughter  
As men from distant lands  
Knelt by her son,  
To worship with their gifts  
More than their words.  
In Bethlehem, she cried,  
God's chosen girl, -  
At the birth pains of Messiah;  
For homelessness -  
The lowly stable where God gave his Son:  
Wept for the census crowd  
Oblivious of the wonder in their midst;  
For cruelty of Herod's wrath,  
And mothers weeping for their sons.  
Her tears became her stepping-stones to God  
On whom she leaned.  
In later years in Nazareth  
She taught her son to sing and cry,  
So all the world could hear  
The laughter in the heart of God;  
Could see the cross he carries still  
For all the sadness of mankind;  
Could meet and know our God  
Who weeps in all our tears,  
Rejoicing in our joys.

## **MY CAMEL WON'T GO !**

Ben Adam rose from his couch beside a food-laden table. Walking out to the patio within the arched courtyard of his palatial home, he looked up into the night sky. With ease he found the star, the star they had been watching for months now since it first appeared on the eastern horizon.

Tonight, however, he watched alone. His companions, Melchior, Casper and Belthasa had left early that same morning to follow the stars north-westerly course.

He imagined his friends settling down in their camp, one day out into the desert. They no doubt, would be looking at the same star, checking their directions. Ben Adam sighed:

*"What would I give to be with them tonight;  
Out in the desert, beyond the plateau:  
I'd love to be there in the shadowed light...  
But... my camel won't go!"*

Above the busy night sounds of the city, Ben Adam felt the silence. He missed his usual evening conversation with his three friends. Here in this room they had discussed the ancient writings. They were sure the new star heralded the birth of a king of all kings. What would they find at their journey's end, he wondered. What sort of palace would be home for the new king. How would they dress to meet him. What of the gifts they would offer?

*"O what joy would be mine if I was there !  
In my gilt-edged robe I would bow down low  
To offer the gift I chose with such care...  
But....my camel won't go !"*

Ben Adam's thoughts were disrupted by the entry of his servant-slave to replenish the wine at his table. With a single glance he took in the familiar figure; the different racial features; the hung head of servitude. Here was one of the spoils of war. He knew a little of how this man experienced sorrow, pain, humiliation, defeat. His thoughts turned again to the star and the king. He remembered how their search of ancient manuscripts had revealed the future coming of a king of all kings. This king would bring an end to war and all the horrors which attend it ....

*"What a day is dawning for all the world !  
Peace, like the rivers from distant mountains will flow ..  
I'd stand at his side to see evil quelled...  
But... my camel won't go !"*

Restless, he returned to the table and snipped a handful of grapes for himself. Yes, they had talked of peace. Surely the king of the star would know the right way to bring peace to the world, without war. He would know all truth. He would be God-like in his wisdom. A son of God in fact! He would explain why the gods allow some to be hungry while others had plenty; why the good suffer pain and rogues enjoy good health...

*"O what would I give the listen to him;  
To grasp the whole meaning of life, and know  
The way to be pure, achieve my life's aim...  
But... my camel won't go !"*

For centuries now people have stood in Ben Adam's shoes. They have heard the story of Bethlehem, of the child and the star. They have learned about Christ, the word of truth who gives meaning to life; the Lord of peace who sets the world free; the King of Glory who brings loving justice to all .... and they....and WE.... have said:

*"O what a message - the Saviour has come;  
God's heaven is here on the earth below:  
I'd follow the Christ...I'd believe in him...  
But.... my camel won't go !"*

## THE GIFTS OF CHRIST

The wise men brought their precious gifts  
Of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh -  
The signs of richest royalty;  
Of holiness, and costliest love -  
Three gifts God had already given -  
Prepared and wrapped by him, in heaven,  
For those he called to share the birth  
Of Christ, the Son of God on earth.

Joseph, true man of principle,  
Kind neighbour and devoted friend,  
Whose love for Mary and for right  
Robbed him of sleep for many nights,  
Unwrapped the frankincense of faith  
And in that parcel, freely given -  
Rich-scented by the breath of heaven -  
Found there a store of other gifts -  
Peace to take away his fear -  
God's power to trust his strange design  
and watch a miracle unfold.

For Mary, God prepared the myrrh  
Of love which mingles joy with pain;  
That in her suffering for Christ -  
hurt of the cradle and the cross -  
Her heart would tune with his own love -  
Would love him, who by his saving grace  
Both gave and bore her every pain;  
And say, in wonder and through tears,  
Your way, my Lord, again, again.

The shepherds had the gift of joy.  
God left his special gift for them  
Behind an inn in Bethlehem,  
And sent a message to the hills  
When all he promised was fulfilled.  
The silver laughter known to men,  
like those who revelled at the inn,  
Became for shepherds, gold of joy -  
There in the manger lay God's boy -  
The promise of a whole new world  
Of peace and love, of truth and joy.

God's gifts to those at Bethlehem -  
The gifts the wise men brought to him -  
He still leaves in lowly places  
Where they are found by all who seek  
For faith in him and peace on earth -  
Who humbly worship at Christ's birth.

## Miracle

A miracle !

What IS a miracle ?

A miracle is earth and heaven blending.

It happens when God enters in

To people's lives and changes things.

A miracle's a splendid thing

Which happens in the commonplace,

When natural people

Doing usual things

Find God is there with them,

Working his will

In their everyday life.

Listen once more to the story -

Timeless, yet for all time -

Of God's gift of his Son - his only son -

The Saviour of the world:

Hear tell of the promise of peace and love;

Of angels at home and up on the hills.

Hear how God chose a village girl;

A carpenter of Nazareth,

And shepherds from the Judah hills:

Hear how God spoke to learned men

And drew them from their distant land

To worship in a home in Bethlehem:

Hear of proud monarchs;

Hear tell of tavern folk:

Of a tiny baby in a stable -

God, humbled in his world -

Hear how God, touching the lives

Of people trav'ling in the common way,

Brought them together in

The greatest miracle of all -

The Christmas miracle !



## This Silent Night

[The shepherds have left the stable. Joseph sleeps. Mary rests with Jesus in her arms. She thinks over all that had happened to them, and whispers her thoughts to her baby]



It's peaceful here tonight, my love.  
Only contented oxen-sighs -  
Breath on breath of angel's wings -  
No other sound of earth and skies.  
Outside, beyond the rough-hewn door  
Are all night cries of in an mart;  
The murm'ring of a restless world  
Preparing burdens for your heart.  
But we will hold this silence, - tight,  
Just for tonight: Just for tonight.

There's rest for us this night, my son.  
The air's so full of mystery -  
God's here - and we such humble folk  
Silent before his majesty.  
This is a place for quiet souls -  
No place for the clamouring crowd -  
The peace of God protects our hearts  
While frozen silence breaks the proud.  
And we will hold this silence - tight,  
Just for tonight: Just for tonight.

The shepherds spoke of angel choirs;  
Of knowing holy fear of God;  
Yet heard the voice speak 'peace', not fear:  
As I, when yielding to his Word,  
Discovered peace beyond my dreams,  
So they were stilled, and so they came,  
By sight, to prove the truth of God:  
With voices hushed to speak his name.  
My child, we'll hold this silence - tight,  
Just for tonight: Just for tonight.

O son ! My son! God's only Son !  
This God-filled peace is comforting:  
For deep in me are anxious thoughts -  
My faith has fears of wavering.  
Before us lies a road of pain;  
God's love must tear us both apart,  
To heal and save a fallen world.  
Yet though he choose to pierce my heart,  
We'll hold the silence of this night;  
Not just tonight, but every night.

## "Will grass be greener ?"



It's said that sheep are silly things,  
Without a mind to call their own,  
But that's not true ! Two ageing ewes  
In pastures over Bethlehem,  
Found much to exercise their thoughts  
The night that Jesus Christ was born.  
For simple minds can often reach  
Amazing insights into truth -  
It's humble folk at daily work  
Who enter heaven while deep in thought -  
And so it seemed a natural thing  
For one old ewe, heavy in lamb,  
To make this comment to her friend:  
"I wonder what the day will bring ?  
Will grass be greener when it dawns ?  
The light of heaven was in these fields.  
They'll surely never be the same."  
A long, long silence followed, till  
The other ewe then found her words -  
True wisdom sets it own slow pace,  
Divorced from all demands of time -  
"What of our shepherds who have gone

To find the child in Bethlehem ?  
Will they be different when they come ?  
If they have seen an angel choir;  
If they have heard the words of heaven;  
If they have seen the one who's come  
To set the whole world free from wrong;  
If they have worshipped Christ the King,  
And knelt before the Lord. Will they  
Be different when the new day dawns ?  
A longer ruminating pause,  
Delaying an answer for a while,  
Allowed for deeper thought, until  
At last the first ewe spoke her mind.  
"I'm not so sure. But I do know  
These men who caught a glimpse of heaven,  
Still quarrelled over who would go  
To see if what was said is true.  
They came to blows about which one  
Should stay behind and watch with us.  
And when determined ALL should go  
They left us here tonight alone."  
She paused again, and then resumed,  
"I wonder what the day will bring ?  
Will grass be greener when it dawns ?"  
"I doubt it", yawned her fellow ewe.  
"Such things require a miracle."  
"But that's the point," the first ewe said,  
"Tonight has been a miracle.  
I wonder what the day will bring ?  
Will grass be greener when it dawns ?"



## Astrapos

*[To the memory of Flash – a docile pony who let me get used to sitting on a horse in readiness for a John Wesley appearance!]*

The call me *Astra* - short for *Astrapos*,  
Translated to your language that means *Flash*;  
Now that's a laugh, and somewhat rash!  
For it's many a day since this old mule  
Across the grassy meadows made his dash,  
Or strode the lanes with rare panache!  
You'll never know how much I've longed  
For those bright days now long, long gone,  
When village lads climbed on my back -  
No saddle then, not even hessian sack -  
To ride me through the narrow streets  
Of Nazareth  
With screams and shouts, like Roman cavalry  
Descending on defenceless towns,  
Scattering people, fruit and pots and pans,  
While relishing the neighbour's angry shouts.

When to the name of *Astra* I was true,  
I used to pine for those lost days  
But now, no more. I've learned of other ways:  
The eager canter, with my head held high  
Fuelled up, inebriate with good fresh hay,  
Has now become a satisfying plod  
A steady pace to keep in step with God;  
A slower ambling stroll, a patient walk  
With time on hoof to hear the angels talk.

It all began to change one awesome day.  
An angel from the very highest place -  
He looked so human - with a glowing face -  
Stopped by awhile to crack at Mary's house.  
No rush, and time to have a bite of lunch,  
He spoke with her of earth-shattering things -  
Salvation coming for the human bunch.

He made his God-sent visit one spring day  
When I was tethered on the patch near home  
To graze the road and tidy up the sycamore.  
Along the narrow way and through the gate

The stranger came, deliberate and slow.  
I knew at once from where he'd come!  
They call us small-brained creatures dumb,  
But we live much closer to that real world  
Which humans rarely see;  
The place where earth and heaven meet  
Where angels walk on human feet;  
You'll never hear their tread on gravel crunch  
But sometimes they will stay for lunch.

From that momentous day till now  
We've travelled many, many miles as one.  
I've carried Mary or she's walked with me.  
We've journey long, we've journeyed slow  
And in the quiet moments of the way  
The youthful mum-to-be has whispered low  
To me her visions, hopes and dreams.  
Her thoughts and tales of things I had not seen.

She told me the story you know so well  
How she believed the angel's word,  
Not knowing what poor Joe would think,  
Just trusting he would have a message too -  
The Lord would send an angel through  
To strengthen him.  
From duty Joe would never shrink.

We travelled over barren hills  
To visit Zac and Liz, awaiting little John;  
And then to Bethlehem - it was God's will  
A long slow journey, travelling on  
Towards the miracle of God's own birth  
In a lowly stable, here on the earth.

I knew a pride in being there  
To see the Saviour of the world had come  
Sharing a stable like my own  
Where he and I could be at home.

I saw it for myself  
I felt old yearnings stir again;  
I longed for astrapos' speed once more  
When shepherds hurtled through the door'  
Rough voices breaking through the night,  
The closest thing to men in flight.

When all was quiet again, the world asleep,  
Then Mary whispered how it all began  
Long, long before her angel came.  
Way back when earth was fresh and new  
Our Father, God, had made a plan.  
Unhurried through the centuries  
He waited, getting things just right,  
To end the strife, to calm the fears  
And wipe away his people's tears.  
Then, unhurriedly, he came - a child for us -  
On that fantastic night in Bethlehem.

Through all that happened then and now  
Mary held fast to her surrender vow.  
*Your will be done*, was all she said.  
*It doesn't matter much how long,*  
*God's way, his time with be the best*  
*I'll happily accept the rest.*

And I, like her, am plodding on.  
My name is *Astra*, that won't change!  
But I have learned how travelling slow  
In God's own time, down here below,  
Is surely unequivocal.  
It gives us time to see a miracle  
And even meet an angel, calling by for lunch.

