

Devotional for the Week – Week 9 (December 23, 2020)

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven,
the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem
and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

Luke 2: 15



Dear friends,

This week, I highlight one of my favorite Christmas carols – one that I learned to play on the piano as a child, and one whose words touch my heart every year – *What Child Is This?* Feelings of sadness come over me whenever I hear this deeply moving carol. It is, after all, set in the key of E minor, the “saddest of all keys.” And yet, triumphant joy dispels the sadness as we exclaim: “This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing.”

The melancholic melody is a famous old British tune called GREENSLEEVES, originally a ballad about a man pining for his lost love, the fair Lady Greensleeves. Tradition said it was composed by King Henry VIII for Anne Boleyn. That’s unlikely, but we do know that Henry’s daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, danced to the tune. Shakespeare referred to it twice in his play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

It was licensed to two different printers in 1580, and soon thereafter it was being used with religious texts. Its first association with Christmas came in 1642 in a book titled *New Christmas Carols*, in which it was used with the poem *The Old Year Now Away Has Fled*. The last verse says:

*Come, give’s more liquor when I doe call,
I’ll drive to each one in this hall...
And God send us a happy new year!*

For 150 years, however, GREENSLEEVES has been most identified with *What Child Is This?* The words of this carol are taken from a longer poem written by an insurance agent named William Chatterton Dix, born in Bristol, England, in 1837. His father was a surgeon who wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. But having no interest in medicine, William left Bristol Grammar School, moved to Glasgow, and sold insurance.

His greatest love was his prose and poetry for Christ. He wrote two devotional books, a book for children, and scores of hymns, two of which remain popular Christmas carols – *What Child Is This?* and *As with Gladness Men of Old*.

All of Dix's hymns should be more widely sung today, for they are masterpieces of poetry, filled with rich spiritual truth. Here's the way he begins his exultant hymn *Alleluia!*

*Alleluia! Sing to Jesus! His the scepter, his the throne.
Alleluia! His the triumph, His the victory alone.*

Enjoy the carol performed by Mercy Me. May it touch your heart as it does mine:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyyRLv0mFa4>

May God bless and keep you,

Carol

*Christ is born so that by his birth he might
Restore our nature. He became a child, was fed and
grew so that he might bring in the one perfect age
to remain forever as he created it. He holds
mankind up so that they may no longer fall. The
creature he formed of earth he now makes heavenly.*

Peter Chrysologus

*Mary's "yes" is a free, responsible
yes by which she accepts becoming
the vessel of the new creation to be
embodied by her Son, Jesus. It is not
the yes of self-denial, almost of irre-
sponsibility, as it has been traditionally
presented to us. Mary knows to whom
she is committing herself.*

Ana Maria Bidegain

*Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit,
seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.*

I Timothy 3: 16

*Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the
rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will
be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

Luke 2: 34-35 (when Jesus was presented in the temple)

