

In the Bleak Midwinter

This carol is the creation of two extraordinary artistic talents: English poet Christina Rossetti and German composer, Gustav Holst, best known for composing the orchestral suite *The Planets*. For me, this melody is the most beautiful of all the Christmas carol melodies.

In the second verse of the carol, Rossetti contrasts the reigning Lord of all heaven and earth with the ruler of all becoming a man and being born in the humblest of circumstances.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain,
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty —
Jesus Christ.

In fact, all the way through the original first four verses, Rossetti juxtaposes the divinity of Jesus with his humanity. And, again, we are encouraged to look back in wonder at his birth as a baby 2,000 years ago, but also to look forward to the day when Jesus will come again and reign over the Earth.

We sing this carol about half-way through the second half of our Christmas concerts. It's always a special moment of devotion. Particularly when we come to the last verse:

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.

It reminds us of the need to not only stand at the crib filled with wonder at the incarnation and adore our God who chooses to take on the fragile frame of a human being; it also reminds us that we need to respond, to do something with the revelation we have received. Our greatest act of worship is not in the gifts and abilities we might have that we can use for God's glory but in the simple, and sometimes harder act of giving our hearts, our full selves, to Jesus in an act of surrender, allowing him to use us as he wishes.

For our latest Christmas tour, we took the Gloria refrain from Antonin Dvořák's *New World* Symphony and added in a chorus; it's just delightful!

Gloria, Gloria! Now my eyes have seen
Soli Deo Gloria! He salvation brings
In the bleak midwinter I may go in peace.

The wonderfully descriptive words and plaintive melody come together to make this a carol that can open our eyes to the eternal truth of the enduring humility and power of the Son of God.

To get tickets for *Sing! An Irish Christmas* tour head over to: <https://www.gettymusic.com/christmas>

Keith Getty

About Keith & Kristyn Getty

Keith and Kristyn Getty occupy a unique space in the world of music today as preeminent modern hymn writers. In re-inventing the traditional hymn form, they are creating and cultivating a catalogue of songs teaching Christian doctrine and crossing the genres of traditional, classical, folk and contemporary composition which are sung the world over. In 2017, Keith Getty was made an "Officer of the Order of the British Empire" (OBE) by Queen Elizabeth II for his contribution to "music and modern hymn writing," marking the first time the award had been given to an individual involved in the world of contemporary church music.

For more information on Getty Music and the Sing! initiative, visit www.gettymusic.com.