

I Sing the Birth was written in 2003 for the South Bend Chamber Singers, Nancy Menk, director. It begins as a traditional celebratory Christmas suite, joyously announcing the birth, telling of the shepherds and wise men, singing a lullaby. It goes on to tell of four-year-old Jesus and the miracle of the birds, and ends with a prayer to keep the ardent joy of Christmas in us always. The first two movements share the jubilant sound of A major. The last two movements flow together, connected by the spirit of prayer and the key of B major. The lullaby stands alone, a peaceful interlude in the midst of deeply felt emotions.

duration: c. 14:00

I SING THE BIRTH

I sing the birth was born tonight,
The author both of life and light;
The angels so did sound it,
And, like the ravished shepherds said,
Who saw the light, and were afraid,
Yet searched, and true they found it.

The Son of God, th'eternal King,
That did us all salvation bring,
And freed our soul from danger,
He whom the whole world could not take,
The Word, which heav'n and earth did make,
Was now laid in a manger.

The father's wisdom willed it so,
The Son's obedience knew no No;
Both wills were in one stature,
And, as that wisdom had decreed,
The Word was now made flesh indeed,
And took on him our nature.

What comfort by him we do win,
Who made himself the price of sin,
To make us heirs of glory!
To see this babe, all innocence,
A martyr born in our defence,
Can man forget the story?

Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

QUEM PASTORES

Quem pastores laudavere,
Quibus angeli dixere,
Absit vobis jam timere,
Natus est rex gloriae.

Ad quem magi ambulabant,
Aurum, thus, myrrham portabant.
Immolabant haec sincere
Nato regi gloriae.

Christo regi, Deo nato,
Per Mariam nobis dato,
Merito resonet vere
Laus, honor et gloria.

German, 14th century

[He whom the shepherds praised,
To whom the angels said,
Do not be afraid now,
Born is the king of glory.

To whom the wise men walked,
They brought gold, frankincense and myrrh,
They offered these sincerely
To the born king of glory.

To Christ the King, to God who is born,
Through Mary to us given,
To the one deserving praise, let there truly resound,
praise, honor and glory.]

Soterios Stavrou (used with permission)

BALULALOW

O my dear heart, young Jesus sweet,
Prepare thy cradle in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee in my heart,
And never mair from thee depart.

But I sall praise thee evermore,
With sangis sweet unto thy gloir:
The knees of my heart sall I bow,
And sing that richt balulalow.

Wedderburn, 1567

THE BIRDS

When Jesus Christ was four years old,
The angels brought Him toys of gold,
Which no man ever had bought or sold.

And yet with these He would not play.
He made Him small fowl out of clay,
And blessed them till they flew away:
Tu creasti Domine.

Jesus Christ, Thou child so wise,
Bless mine hands and fill mine eyes,
And bring my soul to Paradise.

Hilaire Belloc (1916)

INEXTINGUISHABLE BLAZE

O Thou who camest from above,
The pure, celestial fire t' impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart;
There let it for thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer, and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee,
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me;
Ready for all thy perfect will
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make my sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)