

CANTATA 2025—*This Child Shall Be Our Peace*

Song, “Christmastime” (Smith/Larson) w/children

Ring Christmas bells, ring them loud with a message bringing peace on the earth, tidings of good cheer!
Come, carolers, come and join with the angels singing, “Joy to the world!” Christmastime is here!
Children, gather around and listen. You’ll hear the sound of angels filling the sky telling ev’ryone
Christmastime is here! Loved ones close to our hearts and strangers in lands afar together sharing the joy;
Emmanuel! Go, tell the world! He has come to dwell! The time is here! With one voice, let the world
rejoice! Ring Christmas bells....

Song, “Comfort Ye, My People” (Howard Helvey) w/tambourine

Comfort, comfort ye my people, speak ye peace, thus saith our God. Comfort those who sit in darkness,
mourning ‘neath their sorrow’s load. Speak ye to Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them; tell her that
her sins I cover, and her warfare now is over. Hark, the voice of one that crieth in the desert far and near;
calling us to new repentance since the kingdom now is here. Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for
God a way; let the valleys rise to meet Him and the hills bow down to greet Him. Make ye straight what
long was crooked, make the rougher places plain; let your hearts be true and humble, as befits His holy
reign. For the glory of the Lord now o’er earth is shed abroad; and all flesh shall see the token that the
word is never broken.

READING #1: “Linger Near the Manger”

Song, “Come Near to the Manger” (Mark Hayes) w/children

Come near to the manger, come see the small King. Our worship and praise are the gifts that we bring. In
this tiny stable salvation is here. Because of our Savior, there’s nothing to fear. The cattle are lowing, the
poor Baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes. I love Thee, Lord Jesus! Look down from the
sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus lay
down His sweet head. The stars in the sky looked down where He lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the
hay. O sleep.

Song, “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen” (Traditional/arr Molly Ijames)

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 pow’r when we were gone astray. O tidings of comfort and joy, O tidings of
comfort and joy. From God our heav’nly 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, O tidings of comfort and joy. “Fear not,” then said the angel, “let nothing you affright, this
day is born a Savior of a pure virgin bright, to free all those who trust in Him from Satan’s pow’r and might,
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, 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 sacred time of Christmastide all others now deface; O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of comfort and joy!

Song, “I Heard the Bells” (Brenda Austin)

I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth goodwill to all. Refrain: And the bells are ringing, hear them ring. Like a choir they’re singing in my heart I hear them call, “Peace on earth, goodwill to all.” And in despair I bowed my head: “There is no peace on earth,” I said. “For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to all.” Refrain. Till, ringing, singing on its way, the world revolved from night to day. A voice, a chime, a chant sublime of “Peace on earth, goodwill to all.” Refrain.

READING #2: “The Face of the Infant Son”

Song, “Sleep Little Lion, Sleep Little Lamb” (Heather Sorenson)

Jesus, in Your manger lie, go to sleep under starry sky. All the world has said goodnight, waiting for the morning light. (3x) So sleep little Lion, sleep little Lamb. Close Your eyes and slumber while You can. Save Your power, save Your might. The battle begins with the morning light. So sleep little Lion, sleep little Lamb. Earth is cradling the Great I Am. Hush little cry. Hush little roar. Nighttime lingers, so rest some more. Soon enough, You will fight our war. Jesus, in Your manger lie, go to sleep under starry sky...

READING #3: Mary’s Prayer

Song, “This Child Shall Be Our Peace” (Molly Ijames)

This Child shall be our peace. A hush upon the stable, a humble manger bed. A weary mother stroking her sleeping baby’s head. An echo in her mem’ry of ancient prophecies: this Child of Mary’s labor. This child shall be our peace. A flock of sheep awakened, a flood of glorious light, a band of fearful shepherds illumined in the night. The angel voices swelling, their message to release: The Lamb will be our Shepherd, this Child will be our peace. This earthborn Child of Heaven, this fleshbound Son of God, this Man who bore our sorrows, this Lamb who shed His blood. He stills our raging anger, He heals our hopeless grief, calms our frantic worry, He helps our unbelief. Beneath His righteous scepter He makes all war to cease. Come bow the knee before Him. This child shall be our peace, our peace.

READING #1: (Linger Near the Manger)¹

Christianity was born in one big heavenly interruption.

Just ask the Bethlehem shepherds. We know so little about these men. Their names? Their ages? How many were on duty that night? We don't know. But this much we can safely assume: they had no expectations of excitement. They are watching *sheep*. We count *sheep* to go to sleep!

Besides, this is the night shift. Might as well watch paint dry. Shepherds watching sheep sleep? Saying that sentence is more exciting than doing their job. Their greatest challenge was staying awake! These men expected no excitement.

Nor did they want any. Any excitement was bad excitement—wolves, mountain lions, poachers. Shepherds treasure the predictable. They coveted the calm. Their singular aim was to be able to tell their wives, “Nothing happened last night.”

Just because they wanted a calm night, however, didn't mean they would get it.

Luke Chapter 2 says, “Then an angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened.”

Change always brings fear before it brings faith. We always assume the worst before we look for the best. God interrupts our lives with something we've never seen, and rather than praise, we panic! We interpret the presence of a problem as the absence of God and we scoot!

Good thing the shepherds lingered. Otherwise, they might have missed the best part: “Today your Savior was born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord.”

I hope you'll do what the shepherds did—linger near the manger.

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¹ Max Lucado, *In the Manger* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 56-57.

READING #2: (The Face of the Infant God)²

Were someone to chance upon the stable on the outskirts of Bethlehem that morning, what a peculiar scene they would behold.

The stable stinks as all stables do. The ground is hard, the hay is scarce. A more lowly place of birth could scarcely exist.

Off to one side, a group of shepherds sits silently on the floor; perhaps perplexed, perhaps in awe, no doubt in amazement. Their night watch had been interrupted by an explosion of light from heaven and a symphony of angels. God goes to those who have time to hear him—so on this night, he went to simple shepherds.

Near the young mother sits the weary father. If anyone is dozing, he is. He can't remember the last time he sat down. The mystery of the event puzzles him. But he hasn't the energy to wrestle with the questions. What's important is that the baby is fine and that Mary is safe. As sleep comes, he remembers the name the angel told him to use...Jesus.

Mary is wide awake. My, how young she looks! Her head rests on the soft leather of Joseph's saddle. The pain has been eclipsed by wonder. She looks into the face of the baby. Her son. Her Lord. At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what he is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable. She can't take her eyes off Jesus. Somehow, Mary knows she is holding GOD. So *this is he*. She remembers the words of the angel: "Of His kingdom there will be no end."

He looks like anything but a king. And he is absolutely dependent on Mary for his well-being.

Majesty in the midst of the mundane. Holiness in the filth of the sheep manure and sweat. Divinity entered the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenager, and in the presence of a carpenter.

She touches the face of the infant-God. The baby had overlooked the universe. These rags keeping him warm were the robes of eternity. His golden throne room had been abandoned in favor of a dirty sheep pen. And worshipping angels had been replaced with kind but bewildered shepherds.

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² Lucado, *In the Manger*, 60-62.

READING #3: (Mary's Prayer)³

God. O infant-God. Heaven's fairest child. Conceived by the union of divine grace with our disgrace. Sleep well. Sleep well. Bask in the coolness of this night, bright with diamonds. Sleep well, for the heat of anger simmers nearby. Enjoy the silence of the crib, for the noise of confusion rumbles in your future.

Rest well, tiny hands. For though you belong to a king, you will touch no satin, you will own no gold. You will grasp no pen, guide no brush. No, your tiny hands are reserved for works more precious:

To touch a leper's open wound,

To wipe a widow's weary tear,

To claw the ground of Gethsemane.

Your hands, so tiny, so tender, so white—clutched tonight in an infant's fist. They aren't destined to hold a scepter or wave from a palace balcony. They are reserved instead for a Roman spike that will staple them to a Roman cross.

Sleep deeply, tiny eyes. Sleep while you can. For soon the blurriness will clear, and you will see the mess we have made of your world.

You will see our nakedness, for we cannot hide.

You will see our selfishness, for we cannot give.

You will see our pain, for we cannot heal.

O eyes that will see hell's darkest pit and witness her ugly prince...

sleep,

please sleep;

sleep while you can.

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³ Lucado, *In the Manger*, 63-64.