

The Night Before Christmas [Retold]

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through
the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St Nicholas soon would be there.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
All of us wrapped up in nightgown and cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering gaze should appear,
But two pairs of eyes, brimful of fear.

With a faint little smile they beckoned to me,
Waved up at the window, as they hid near a tree.
So gathering my wits I flew down the stairs,
And the family followed; wondering what could be
there.

With caution we drew back the rusty old lock
And pushed back the door to see what we'd got.
And there on the lawn with faces so white
And bodies that trembled in the cold of the night,

Were two frightened souls clutching each other.
Like Husband and wife, or sister and brother.
They took a step forward, in silver moonlight
"Would you have a room to spare for the night?"

The man whispered the words, and his voice was
so frail
That he must have been treading an awfully long
trail.
"Our house is all full, and ready for morn
When Christmas will come with the first light of
dawn."

I was sorry to tell them and turn them away
I felt like the innkeeper on that first Christmas day.
As they turned to go my heartbeat went wild
For the young girl was clearly expecting a child.

"Wait!" we all cried, and shocked ourselves so.

"You can't walk away – where will you go?"
"We'll find somewhere soon," the man said with a
smile,
"We've been knocking on doors for a good long
while."

And we watched as they melted back into the night
And quite, quite soon had gone from our sight.
With thoughtful frowns we slipped back inside
And no sooner had done so - St Nicholas arrived.

Down the chimney the jolly man came with a
bound,
Bringing with him an awfully big sound.
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and
soot.

A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler, just opening his pack.
His eyes- how they twinkled! his dimples how
merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk.

And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
As he scrambled to leave his head reappeared
"Did you get my best present, I don't see it round
here?"

"Which present was that?" I asked with surprise,
And the glint of a sparkle sprang to his eyes.
"The new-born child," he said with a smile
"The one who makes Christmas worth all the while."

The child once born in the dark and the night,
The child who one day will set the world right."
But we all shook our heads and looked to the door.
"We sent them to where they'd come from
before."

For a moment his rosy cheeks turned white
"They'll still be around out there in the night."
Then he brightened again, gave his beard a shake,
and said,
"Why not ask them in - see what difference they
make?"
And he called out to us as we ran from his sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

Response Story - The Shepherds [1]

Shepherds - "Ooh aarr!" **Angel** - "Alleluia" **Sheep** - Baa!

Bright - Flick fingers out and say "WHOOSH!"

Trough - Sniff twice, say "UGH!" **Baby** - Suck thumb/or say "Aah!"

Teach the above responses to the congregation or audience and invite them to join in the story.

While **shepherds** watched their **sheep**
one night
All seated on the ground,
An **angel** in the sky appeared
And **bright** light shone around.

"Fear not!" The **angel** said, for they were
Scared out of their minds.
"I've got good news - the future's **bright**
For you and all mankind."

The **angel** said: "In Bethlehem
A **baby's** just been born;
His name is Jesus - and he will be,
Your helper, friend and Lord!

You'll find this little **baby**
In a **trough** made of wood;
He'll be wrapped up in an animal trough
And the place won't smell too good!"

And when the **angel** took a break
A million more turned up -
All shining **bright** and singing strong,
And praising God above.

Then all the **shepherds** left their **sheep**
And ran into the town -
They walked in circles trying to find out
What was going down.

They saw a place there lit up **bright**
Just like a Christmas tree.
They saw the **trough**, crept inside,
And dropped on bended knee.

The parents of the **baby** there -
They looked surprised and stressed.
The **shepherds** grinned, the **baby** stared,
The **sheep** were not impressed.

All the **shepherds** worshipped him
Then went back to their **sheep**.
The **baby** in the **stable** yawned
And just went back to sleep!

And since that time of **sheep** and
shepherds;
And **stables** shining **bright**;
The **baby** has become a king -
And what the **angel** said - was right.

Response Story - The Shepherds [2]

Shepherds - "Ooh aarr!" **Angel** - "Alleluia"

Bright - Flick fingers out and say "WHOOSH!"

Animal trough - Sniff twice, say "UGH!"

Baby - Suck thumb/or say "Aah!" **Sheep** - Baa!

A long time ago there was a group of **shepherds** out in the fields one night watching their **sheep**. In those days **shepherds** had to watch their sheep at night to keep them safe. Suddenly, as they were watching the **sheep** a **bright** light shone in the sky and an **angel** appeared from nowhere.

"Don't be frightened," said the **angel**, "I've got good news - the future's looking very **bright** for you and your **sheep**! Tonight, nearby in Bethlehem a **baby** has just been born - in an **animal trough**. He is God's son, and He will be your friend and your Lord. This is how to find him - look for a **baby**, in that **animal trough**!"

"Are you sure he'll be in an **animal trough**?" asked one of the **shepherds**.

"Oh yes," said the **angel**, "you'll feel right at home!"

Suddenly a huge crowd of **angels** appeared - all shining **bright** and singing about the **baby**.

When the **angels** stopped singing the **shepherds** all ran off into town, where they found a cave, **brightly** lit up, with a **baby** inside - just as the **angel** had said. Quietly they crept inside the knelt down in front of an **animal trough** which held the **baby**. His parents looked amazed to see them all, especially as they were followed by three **angels** and a flock of sheep!

And there in the sawdust and the straw they worshipped the **baby** - and they could see that he was someone special. Then they jumped up and rounded up their **sheep**, said goodbye to the **baby** and the **angels**, and left the **bright** cave - telling everyone they met that they had seen the new-born king.

The Word

A seed.
Delivered in love.
An angel's voice
And a frightened mother.
A whispered message -
And the word became flesh.
In one instant:
the Creator became the created
the Master became servant
the Communicator became one word.

Full of grace and truth -
A human being floodlit with perfection.
Our eyes gazed
But were unable to see.
Our ears listened
But could not hear.
Our voices cried out
And were nothing more than clanging
cymbals.
Our senses beheld His glory -
And could not cope.

The music of divine song rose from His
heart,
Gushed from His very being;
And though we did our best to capture
it
The song broke free
From our small minded grasp.

The word sailed on through the night
Cutting the darkness,
Dividing doubt,
Sweeping away ignorance like a cloud.

And out of the fullness of His grace
He has blessed us all -
One blessing after another.
Fulfillment and hunger;
Satisfaction and thirst.
Tasting more than we ever dreamt -
Desiring more than we ever knew
existed.

The word became flesh
And dwelt among us,
Until we no longer desired His
company.
Then the word became death, doubt
and decay;
Lies and misery;
Agony and malice.

And the word came to rest in a quiet
tomb.
Until the time was right to speak again.
Until another Sunday morning when an
angel's voice,
And another whispered message
Called it back into song.

No one has ever seen God
But the only Son,
Now, He has made Him known.

When God Appeared

When God appeared they expected a warrior,
An angel of light, and a king.
Not a suffering servant, rejected of men -
No one expected him.

A fodder trough, a stable of pain,
A terrified mother to be.
Was this the man to change the world?
Was this the way to be free?

So he was born, in the dregs and the dung,
A fragile child of the night.
Shepherds knelt in astonished array,
And men from the East saw the light.

Yes, poor men and rich, came travelling to see.
Both wealth and poverty.
The kings brought gifts of spices and gold
The shepherds just bowed the knee.

Is there sense in all this? Such a frail act of God,
Was their power in such poverty?
The search for the stable continues today,
There's a cross in its place - you can see...

And a man hangs in pain, nailed there with love,
And his mother's in agony too.
In the turmoil her mind drifts back to the stable -
Where she knew that this had to come true.

Gold for a king, incense for a God -
But myrrh, now that's for a cross.
And the king is enthroned with thorns and three nails;
And the God dies in frailty for us.

And Christmas is not merely about the snow and the glitter,
The chocolates, the pudding, the tree.
No - Christmas has come for the poor and the weak -
It has come for you and for me.

[All pieces D. Hopwood]