

A Child Is Born in Bethlehem

Puer natus in Bethlehem

8.3. 8. and alleluias

Puer natus in Bethlehem

Latin folk hymn, 13th c.

Latin chant, 14th c.

German Version: *Geistliche Lieder*, Leipzig, 1545

Setting: Bartholomäus Gesius, 1601, alt.

Tr. Christopher J. Neuendorf, 2014

1 A Child is born in Beth - le - hem,
 2 The Child that in the man - ger lies,
 3 The ox and don - key bring Him laud,
 4 The kings from She - ba jour - ney there,

Beth - le - hem, The Joy of all Je -
 Man - ger lies, For - ev - er reigns a -
 Bring Him laud, For well they know the
 Jour - ney there, Gold, frank - in - cense, and

ru - sa - lem. Al - le, Al - le - lu - ia!
 bove the skies. Al - le, Al - le - lu - ia!
 Lord their God. Al - le, Al - le - lu - ia!
 myrrh they bear. Al - le, Al - le - lu - ia!

5 His mother is the virgin maid,
 Virgin maid,
 Who gave Him birth with no man's aid.
 Alle, Alleluia!

7 As to the flesh He is our kin,
 Is our kin,
 And yet unlike us as to sin.
 Alle, Alleluia!

6 The Serpent could not poison Him,
 Poison Him,
 He's joined our race, yet without sin.
 Alle, Alleluia!

8 Like unto Him we thus are wrought,
 Thus are wrought,
 And back into God's kingdom brought.
 Alle, Alleluia!

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9 For such a season, rich in grace,
 Rich in grace,
 To God forevermore be praise!
 Alle, Alleluia!

10 Praise to the Holy Trinity,
 Trinity,
 From now unto eternity!
 Alle, Alleluia!

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THE CHRISTMAS HYMN “A Child Is Born in Bethlehem” (*Ein Kind geboren zu Bethlehem*) originated as a Latin folk-hymn, *Puer natus in Bethlehem*, in thirteenth-century Bohemia. It became quite popular throughout Germany and endured through the centuries following the Reformation. Even when German translations had entered into common use, hymnals continued to include the Latin stanzas alongside their German counterparts well into the seventeenth century.

Many German versions were produced by various anonymous translators. The basis for the translation used by the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book is that which appeared in Valentin Babst’s *Geistliche Lieder*, Leipzig, 1545, No. 57. There it was included with the heading “An Old Spiritual Song on the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” in a section with the introduction, “These old songs which follow hereafter we have also included as a witness to certain pious Christians who lived before us in the darkness of false doctrine, so that one may see how there have at all times been people who have known Christ aright and were wondrously kept in the confession of the same through God’s grace.” Though nineteenth-century English translations abound, none has become standard in the Lutheran tradition. It was therefore thought worthwhile to add to their number yet another English version, which, it is to be hoped, is singable while also reflecting the deep theological truths of this deceptively simple text.

The melody began as a fourteenth-century chant, which developed into the rhythmic melody partially preserved in the tenor line in the setting here provided. In the mid-sixteenth century, a descant added to the original melody took hold and became a new melody in its own right. The setting used for the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book is taken mostly from Bartholomäus Gesius, *Geistliche deutsche Lieder*, Frankfurt an der Oder, 1601, p. 17v, with some material from Michael Praetorius. Both text and music may be freely used and reproduced for any purpose whatever, and are offered with the prayer that they may serve for the edification of Christian people everywhere. For more information, visit the Free Lutheran Chorale-Book at:

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AN OLD SPIRITUAL SONG

ON THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

A CHILD IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM

WRITTEN BY CERTAIN

PIOUS CHRISTIANS

WHO THOUGH THEY DWELT IN THE DARKNESS OF FALSE DOCTRINE
NEVERTHELESS KNEW CHRIST ARIGHT AND WERE WONDROUSLY
KEPT STEADFAST IN THE CONFESSION OF THE SAME

THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD ALONE

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY

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