

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FC 7553

# American Folk Songs for Christmas



## 20 AMERICAN FOLK SONGS FOR CHRISTMAS

Selected from Ruth Crawford Seeger's American Folk Songs for Christmas (Doubleday and Co., 1953).

Sung and played by her daughters Peggy, Barbara, and Penny, assisted by a group of children from the South Boston Music School.

Notes compiled and edited from the author's manuscripts by Charles and Peggy Seeger.

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## American Folk Songs for Christmas

In The Morning When I Rise  
Oh, Watch The Stars  
Shine Like A Star In The Morning  
Bright Morning Stars Are Rising  
Rise Up, Shepherd And Follow  
Joseph & Mary (The Cherry Tree  
Carol)  
Oh, Mary And The Baby, Sweet  
Lamb  
Babe Of Bethlehem  
Cradle Hymn  
Ain't That A Rockin' All Night  
Sing Hallelu  
Mary Had A Baby  
Jesus Born In Bethlea  
January, February .. (The Last  
Month of the Year)  
Poor Little Jesus  
The Angel Band  
The Twelve Apostles

Descriptive Notes Are Inside Pocket  
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Note: Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from Mrs. Seeger's book.

TELL MY JESUS "MORNING" - A small fragment of a Negro slave song, in which the singer's familiarity with Jesus is typical. Originally "howdy-o" was "huddy-o", an equivalent of "morning", or "good morning". -From Slave Songs of the United States, by Allen, Ware and Garrison.

OH, WATCH THE STARS - St. Helena Island, South Carolina. Because of their isolation from main arteries of communication, the islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina have long supported sparse populations of Negroes inheriting some of the oldest tradition of plantation life, including a distinctive repertory of folklore and song. -From St. Helena Island Spirituals, by N. G. J. Ballanta-Taylor.

SHINE LIKE A STAR IN THE MORNING - Virginia. A fragment taken from the Archive of American Folksong in the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

BRIGHT MORNING STARS ARE RISING - Kentucky. The words of this song are typical of the shape-note hymn, especially in the apostrophe of the ancestors (father, mother, and so forth), but the original singer probably delivered his own particular version which throws the ordinarily strict-tempo melody into an alternation of 5/4 - 4/4 - 3/4 measures. -also from the Archive.

RISE UP, SHEPHERD, AND FOLLOW - probably from Virginia. A plantation song, a vigorous exchange between leader and group-chorus, giving a brief counsel to the shepherds. -From Religious Folksongs of the Negro, As Sung on the Plantations (Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia).

JOSEPH AND MARY - Kentucky. This fine variant of the Cherry Tree Carol is unusual in having been originally sung solo with a prelude and interlude on the fiddle. Especially significant is stanza 6 where the melody of "Bow down, cherry tree" differs markedly in both contour and harmony from that of the other verses. -also from the Archive.

STAR IN THE EAST and BAE OF BETHLEHEM - Shape-note hymns from Southern Harmony (1st edition, 1835). "Singin' Billy Walker", its compiler and editor, was one of the great singing-school teachers who used the "four-shape", or patent note, music notation. The hymns are printed for three voices, treble, bass and tenor, the melody being carried by the last mentioned. Although they are traditionally sung without accompaniment, that used here in "Star in the East", with its almost harsh omissions of 3rds and 6ths in the chords and parallel movement in octaves and fifths, reproduces exactly the original setting, except that the melody has been transferred from the tenor to the soprano.

CHILD OF GOD - Louisiana and Georgia. Learned by the original singer from a printed "ballet" (perhaps a descendent of the British broadsheet), this is one of the true carols, or "noëls" that are still sung in these states. -From Mellows, by R. E. Kennedy, and Journal of American Folklore, 1899, Vol. 12.

CRADLE HYMN - Kentucky. "The tune, from a Tennessee singer, is closely related to the shape-note hymn "Restoration" (from the Southern Harmony). The words are part of the 14-stanza poem by Isaac Watts. In Kentucky, "Cradle Hymn" stanzas are said to have been sung to the tune of "Go Tell Aunt Nancy": this latter ... can be traced back to a simplification of an air from Jean Jacques Rousseau's opera, Le Devin du Village, 1752. Rousseau's tune is itself clearly in folk idiom."

AIN'T THAT A ROCKING ALL NIGHT - St. Helena Island, South Carolina. -See note on "Oh, Watch the Stars".

MARY, WHAT YOU GOING TO NAME THAT PRETTY LITTLE BABY? - Obviously a Negro leader and group-chorus song, perhaps with alternating question and answer verses. -From African Music in America, by J. R. Murphy.

SING HALLELU and MARY HAD A BABY - Both from the St. Helena Island, South Carolina, these two songs are very alike in form and the same words may be sung to both, save for the differing refrains. -See note on "Oh, Watch the Stars".

JESUS BORNED IN BETHLEA - Virginia. This song was transcribed from a record by Mr. S. F. Russell, of Mardon, Va., in 1936, and has been found in other states throughout the south. -From the Archive.

POOR LITTLE JESUS - A shouting spiritual, taking a relatively uncomplicated melody and using a few phrases from the Bible. "The shouting spiritual, ... the type of song developed by Negro slaves in the Deep South, more or less independently of white revivals ... The slave took what he could learn of this new religion /Christianity/ to the slave quarters and worshipped this new God in his own fashion - that is, by dancing, by song and by possession. He called these dancing meetings, "shouts," using the Arabic word "Saut" current on the West Coast of Africa, which means to walk or run around the Kaaba. One of these "shouts" was described in THE NATION in 1867, as follows: '... all stand up in the middle of the floor and, when the sperrchil is struck up, begin first walking and, by and by, shuffling around, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor and the progression is due to a jerking hitching motion which agitates the entire shout-er ... Sometimes they dance silently, sometimes ... sing the chorus of the sperrchil. But more frequently a band, composed of some of the best singers, stand at the side of the room to bass the others, singing the body of the song, and clapping their hands together or on their knees.'" -quoted from Folk Song: USA, by John and Alan Lomax.

HEARD FROM HEAVEN TODAY - Found in the Port Royal Islands, South Carolina, in 1861, where it was in current use, this song was reported to be sung regularly at church by the entire congregation with a swaying bodily movement, rhythmical tapping of hands and feet, head nodding, and so forth.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES - Kansas. Mrs. Seeger writes: "Some say that each line of this very old number-song (known in other versions as "Green Grow the Rushes-o," "The Dilly Song," "The Carol of the Numbers"), once had religious significance. Such an apparently nonsensical expression as "pot waters," for instance, may have had reference to

the miracle of turning the six water pots into wine at the marriage in Cana. "Gabbler rangers" is undoubtedly related to the "Gabriel angels" or "Great Archangel" of other versions. "Nine bright shiners" ("nine of the bridal shine" in an earlier singing) referred perhaps to the nine orders of angels supposed to be present at the marriage of the Lamb. "Thrivers" is heard elsewhere as "shivers," "riders," occasionally "strangers" (the three wise men?). "Lily-white bud" is more often "lily-white babes" (Christ and John the Baptist?). The religious significance of the number One usually remains undimmed, except for occasional confusing of "ever" and "never." But the singer from whose recording this song was learned, insisted that no doubt existed in her mind about the word "never." -also from the Archive.

THE ANGEL BAND - Frogmore, South Carolina. In some versions of this song, the counting goes up to twenty, but it is possible to count into the hundreds. The chorus in other versions contain various spiritual themes, in which "Jesus rose on a Sunday morning", "mourners got to shoutin' on Sunday mornin'", and so on. -From 36 South Carolina Spirituals, by Carl Diton; and The Negro and His Songs, by Odum and Johnson.

HEAVEN BELL RING - A shouting spiritual from South Carolina. "The term "shouting" can refer to one of various forms of religious dance, usually with clapping and singing. Or it can have vocal meaning only. There are occasional Biblical references to shouting in worship, such as "O clap your hand, all ye people: shout unto God with the voice of triumph" (Psalms 47:1)." -also from the Archive.

A MINCE PIE OR A PUDDING - New York. "This song is one of the many "welcome" songs used in Shaker communities to greet friends, especially elders or ministers." -From The Gift to Be Simple by Edward D. Andrews.

OLD CHRISTMAS - A piano adaptation of a fiddle tune from Kentucky.

#### IN THE MORNING WHEN I RISE (Page 8)

In the morning when I rise,  
Tell my Jesus howdy-o,  
Wash my hands in the morning glory,  
Tell my Jesus howdy-o.

#### OH, WATCH THE STARS (Page 13)

Oh, watch the stars, see how they run,  
Oh, watch the stars, see how they run,  
The stars run down at the setting of the sun,  
Oh, watch the stars, see how they run.

#### SHINE LIKE A STAR IN THE MORNING (Page 14)

Shine, shine, shine like a star in the morning,  
Shine, shine all around the throne of God,  
God knows I'm gonna ...

#### BRIGHT MORNING STARS ARE RISING (Page 15)

Bright morning stars are rising,  
Bright morning stars are rising,  
Bright morning stars are rising,  
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

Oh, where are our dear fathers?  
Oh, where are our dear fathers?  
Oh, where are our dear fathers?  
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

Some have gone to heaven shouting, etc.

Some are down in the valley praying, etc.

Bright morning stars are rising, etc.

#### RISE UP, SHEPHERD, AND FOLLOW (Page 16)

There's a star in the East on Christmas morn,  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow,  
It'll lead to the place where the Savior's born,  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

#### REFRAIN:

Leave your sheep and leave your lambs,  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow,  
Leave your ewes and leave your rams,  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.  
Follow, follow,  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow,  
Follow the Star of Bethlehem,  
Rise up, shepherd, and follow.

If you take good heed of the angel's words,  
You'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds.

#### JOSEPH AND MARY (THE CHERRY TREE CAROL) (Page 24)

Joseph was an old man,  
An old man was he,  
He married Virgin Mary,  
The Queen of Galilee.

As Joseph and Mary was walkin',  
Was walkin' one day,  
"Here are apples, here are cherries,"  
Mary did say.

Then Mary said to Joseph,  
So meek and so mild,  
"Joseph gather me some cherries,  
For I am with Child."

Then Joseph flew in anger,  
In anger flew he,  
"Let the father of the Baby  
Gather cherries for thee."

Jesus spoke a few words,  
A few words spoke he,  
"Give my mother some cherries,  
Bow down, cherry tree!

"Bow down, cherry tree,  
Low down to the ground."  
Mary gathered cherries  
And Joseph stood around.

Joseph took Mary  
All on his right knee,  
"What have I done, Lord?  
Have mercy on me."

Then Joseph took Mary  
All on his left knee,  
"Oh, tell me, little Baby,  
When Thy birthday will be."

"On the sixth day of January  
My birth day will be,  
When the stars in the elements  
Will tremble with glee."



OH, MARY AND THE BABY, SWEET LAMB (Page 35)

Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb. (4 times)

I love that Baby, sweet Lamb, (3)  
Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb.

Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb. (4)

It's a God-sent Baby, sweet Lamb, (3)  
Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb.

Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb. (4)

BABE OF BETHLEHEM (Page 38)

Ye nations all, on you I call,  
Come hear this declaration,  
And don't refuse this glorious news  
Of Jesus and salvation.  
To all the earth proclaim the birth  
Of Christ the great Messiah,  
As was foretold by prophets old,  
Isaiah, Jeremiah.

His parents poor in earthly store  
To entertain the stranger  
They found no bed to lay His head,  
But in the ox's manger:  
No royal things, as used by kings,  
Were seen by those that found Him,  
But in the hay the stranger lay,  
With swaddling bands around Him.

On the same night a glorious light  
To shepherds there appeared.  
Bright angels came in shining flame,  
They saw and greatly feared.  
The angels said, "Be no afraid,  
Although we much alarm you,  
We do appear good news to bear,  
As now we will inform you.

"The city's name is Bethlehem,  
In which God hath appointed,  
This glorious morn a Savior's born,  
For him God hath annointed;  
By this you'll know, if you will go,  
To see this lovely stranger,  
His lovely charms in Mary's arms,  
Both lying in a manger."

CRADLE HYMN (Page 41)

Hush, my babe, lie still and slumber,  
Holy angels guard thy bed,  
Heav'nly blessings without number  
Gently stealing on thy head.

How much better art thou attended  
Than the Son of God could be  
When from heaven he descended  
And became a child like thee.

Soft and easy in thy cradle,  
Coarse and hard the Savior lay  
When His birthplace was a stable  
And His softest bed way hay.

AIN'T THAT A ROCKIN' ALL NIGHT (Page 42)

Mary had a little Baby, Every time the Baby cry,  
Born in Bethlehem, She rock in a weary land.

REFRAIN:

Ain't that a rockin' all night, (3)  
All night long.

SING HALLELU (Page 46)

Down in a valley, Sing hallelu. (4 times)

Mary had a Baby, Sing hallelu. (4)

What did she name Him? etc. (4)

Named Him Jesus, etc. (4)

MARY HAD A BABY (Page 47)

Mary had a Baby, Aye, Lord,  
Mary had a Baby, Aye, my Lord,  
Mary had a Baby, Aye, Lord,  
The people keep a-comin' and the train done gone.

Who came to see Him? etc.

Shepherds came to see Him. etc.

King Herod tried to find Him. etc.

They went away to Egypt. etc.

Angels watching over etc.

Mary had a Baby. etc.

JESUS BORN IN BETHLEA (Page 48)

Jesus born in Bethlea,  
Jesus born in Bethlea,  
Jesus born in Bethlea,  
And in the manger lay,  
And in the manger lay, and in the manger lay,  
Jesus born in Bethlea and in the manger lay.

Mary was His mother, etc.

JANUARY, FEBRUARY (THE LAST MONTH OF THE YEAR)

(Page 50)

What month was my Jesus born in?  
On the last month of the year.  
What month was my Jesus born in?  
On the last month of the year.

REFRAIN:

Oh! January (January), February (February), March,  
O lawdy,  
April, May and June, oh, July, August, September,  
October and-a November, on the twenty-fifth day of  
December,  
On the last month of the year.

POOR LITTLE JESUS (Page 52)

It was poor little Jesus, yes, yes,  
He was born on Christmas, yes, yes,  
And laid in a manger, yes, yes,  
Wasn't that a pity and a shame? Lawd, Lawd,  
Wasn't that a pity and a shame?

Poor little Jesus, yes, yes,  
Child of Mary, yes, yes,  
Didn't have no cradle, yes, yes,  
Wasn't that a pity and a shame? Lawd, Lawd,  
Wasn't that a pity and a shame?

Poor little Jesus, yes, yes,  
They took Him from a manger, yes, yes,  
They took Him from His mother, yes, yes, etc.

#### THE ANGEL BAND (Page 74)

There was one, there was two, there was three little  
angels,  
There was four, there was five, there was six little  
angels,  
There was seven, there was eight, there was nine little  
angels,  
Ten little angels in the band.

#### REFRAIN:

Wasn't that a band,  
Sunday morning, Sunday morning, Sunday morning,  
Wasn't that a band,  
Sunday morning, Sunday morning so soon.

#### THE TWELVE APOSTLES (Page 66)

"Stay and I'll sing!"

"What'll you sing?"

"I'll sing One."

"What is One?"

"One's a One and all alone and that shall never be-o".

Two bear a lilywhite bud and they were clad in green-o,  
One's a One and all alone and that shall never be-o.

Three, three, thrivers, etc.

Four for the Gospel writers, etc.

Five come on my boys, and Four for the Gospel  
writers, etc.

Six for the six pot waters, etc.

Seven be all the stars, and Six for the six pot  
waters, etc.

Eight for the gabbling rangers, etc.

Nine for the nine bright shiners, etc.

Ten for the Ten Commandments, etc.

Eleven for the eleven archangels, etc.

Twelve for the Twelve Apostles, etc. (up to ...)  
One's a One and all alone and that is all we'll sing-o.

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Songs for Christmas (Doubleday and Co., 1953).

Sung and played by her daughters Peggy, Barbara, and  
Penny, assisted by a group of children from the South  
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