American Folk Songs for Christmas

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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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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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CRAIGE HYMN - Kentucky. "The tune, from a Tennessee singer, 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, "Craige 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 ROCKIN 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. A. Murphy.

SING BALLENN 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 BONNED IN BETHLEHEM - Virginia. This song was transcribed from a record by Mr. S. F. Russell, of Marion, 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 Knahe. 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 shouter ... 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 sing the others, while the body of the song, and a clapping their hands together or on their knees.' -quoted from Folk Song: U.S.A. by John and Alan Lomax.

HEARD FROM HEAVEN TODAY - Found in the Port Royal Islands, South Carolina, in 1866, 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. "Gabriel angels" 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. "Thieves" is heard elsewhere as "thieves," "riders," occasionally "strangers" (the three wise men?) "Lily-white bud" is more often "lily-white babe" (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 - Foggmore, 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 16 South Carolina Spirituals, by Carl Ditson; and The Negro and His Songs, by Oden 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. It can have vocal meaning only. There are occasional Biblical references to shouting in worship, such as "O clap your hands, all ye people: shout unto God with the voice of triumph." (Psalms 47:1). "-also from the Archive.

A MINE PEEF 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-breakin' in my soul.

Oh, where are our dear fathers!
Oh, where are our dear fathers!
Oh, where are our dear fathers!
Day is a-breakin' in my soul.

Some have gone to heaven shoutin', etc.
Some are down in the valley prayin', 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.

REPEAL:
Leave your sheep and leave your lambs,
Rise up, shepherd, and follow,
Leave your eyes and leave your ears,
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',
Washington: one day,
There are apples, here are cherries,
Mary did say.

Then Mary said to Joseph,
Do seek and do find,
"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,
Bough down, cherry tree,
Bough 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. (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-send Baby, sweet Lamb, (3)
Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb.
Oh, Mary and the Baby, sweet Lamb. (4)

MARY OF BETHLEHEM (Page 36)

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 not 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 born a Savior's born,
For him God hath appointed;
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 was hay.

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

Mary had a little Baby,
Born in Bethlehem,
Every time the Baby cry,
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)
Huged His 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-commin' 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 BETHLEHEM (Page 48)

Jesus born in Bethle-
Jesus born in Bethle-
Jesus born in Bethle-
Jesus born in Bethle-
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,
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? Lord, Lord,
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? Lord, Lord,
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 gambing 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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