

**Shall they hear news, a whisper on the night wind?
“A Child is born.” “The meek shall inherit the earth.”
Shall a quiet dome of stars high over
Make signs and a friendly language
Among all nations?
Shall they yet gather with no clenched fists at all,
And look into each other’s faces and see eye to eye,
And find ever new testaments of man as a sojourner
And a toiler and a brother of fresh understandings?
Shall there be now always
believers and more believers
of sunset and moonrise,
of moonset and sunrise,
of wheeling numbers of stars,
and wheels within wheels?
Shall plain habitations off the well-known roads
Count now for a little more than they used to?
Shall plain ways and people held close to earth
Be reckoned among things to be written about?
Shall tumult, grandeur, fanfare, panoply, prepared
 loud noises
Stand equal to a quiet heart, thoughts, vast dreams
Of men conquering the earth by conquering themselves?
Is there a time for ancient genius of man
To be set for comparison with the latest generations?
Is there a time for stripping to simple childish questions
On a Holy Night we may say:
The Creator of night and of birth
Was the Maker of the stars.**

**SPOKEN AND SILENT
PRAYER, MEDITATION, REFLECTION**

**The planets in the heavens above revolve in their accustomed paths,
And in the Great Beyond that is our cosmos the billions of
galaxies race outward from the center of the universe toward the
unknown, the mystery.**

**Here, in the quiet of a winter night, we gather to
commemorate a birth in Bethlehem, a birth in which, poetically, we're
told a star paused, suspended over the birthplace of one spoken of as a
Prince of Peace.**

**As prayers were no doubt said by the parents of the babe for not too hard
a birth and the survival of the mother and her child, just like the
prayers of fathers and mothers the world over, so too do we pray.**

**That the message delivered by this prophet who the story says was born in
a rude stable with nothing but a manger for his bed and grew up
wise enough to not reject but embrace his background and preach a
revelation to and for the poor, the down-trodden, the afflicted and
the wretched, preach**

**That they too were the children of the world, equally precious
equally loved, equally worthy of the richness and beauty of the
earth, and equally entitled to its bounty.**

**As the angels sang of "Peace on Earth", Jesus was born to speak of justice
and fairness on earth.**

We pray on this special night for the ability to truly hear and truly heed both the angel's and the prophet's message:

“Peace on Earth, Justice toward All.”

ANTHEM

STAR MOTHER'S YOUNGEST CHILD
A Christmas Story for Children and Adults
adapted from the story by Louise Moeri

There was once an old woman who had no relatives at all, no children, or grandchildren. .. No one at all to keep her company in her old age except Uproar, her old hound dog. Once upon a Christmas, in her house on the edge of the forest, a long walk from the village over the hill, she sat drowsing and grumbling beside a low fire. All her chores were done, but as she rocked in her chair she muttered “Just once, only once, I'd like to have a real Christmas, with a tree and presents and candles and music and a feast. Is that to much to ask?”

Outside the wind blew cold against the little house and snowflakes lifted up from the drifts and skittered against the windows. A wolf howled at the moon and the shadows of the forest grew blacker and blacker as the night wore on. The old woman got ready for bed, but before she blew out the candle she went to the door, opened it and looked out. Seeing the vast canopy of stars overhead she thrust back her head and shouted – right up at the stars – “Is that too much to ask?” And then she went to bed.

Now up in the sky another old woman, Star Mother, was very busy, and very bothered, because her youngest child, so new he didn't even have a name yet, was fussing and banging about and being a pest. “What's the

matter”“ cried Star Mother, “Here it is Christmas Eve and I have to be bothered by you being cranky!”

“Mother!” Youngest Child wailed. “I want to celebrate Christmas like they do down there.” And he pointed to the earth floating like an iridescent green Christmas bauble far below. “I’d like to celebrate with a Christmas tree, and candles, and presents, and music. Is that too much to ask?”

Star Mother thought about it for a moment and said “Well, no. Run along, I’ll think of something.”

Christmas morning dawned clear and cold. The old woman lay deep under the coverlets on her bed, sleeping and dreaming. BANG. BANG! BANG!! Hello!!! Wake UP! Grumbling and wheezing the old woman drew a quilt around her shoulders and went and opened the door.

There upon the doorstep stood the raggedest, ugliest, most unattractive child she had ever seen. He had patched clothes, a wrinkled brown face, and yellow hair that stood up like dry grass all over his head. Worst of all he looked cold and hungry. ...

“I’m looking” said the ugly child, “for Christmas.” The old woman threw up her hands. “And where did you expect to find Christmas? Here?”

The ugly Child peered past the old woman into the poor little hut. He carefully took in the shabby furniture, the bare table, the sparse shelves of food and clothing. “Well,” he muttered, “here is where I am.”

“Oh come in, come in” cried the old woman in exasperation. She grabbed the boy’s arm and dragged him into the room.” ...

The old woman went into the lean-to and put on her workaday dress. She pulled on some heavy woolen stockings and leather boots and ties on a shawl and a bonnet. “What are you going to do?” Asked the Ugly child. “Chores,” snapped the Old Woman. “What else?” She grabbed some buckets and went out. The Ugly Child followed her.

The sun had risen into a dazzling blue sky but seemed not to have warmed the air at all. As they walked toward the cow shed their breath hung in front of them in a white mist. The Ugly Child followed at the Old Woman’s heels, while Uproar floundered beside them through the drifted snow. All the roofs were capped with mounds of snow and the fir trees hung heavy with icicles that gleamed in the sun..

“Hey!” cried the Ugly Child. “I see one! I see one!”

“What? Where?” Cried the Old Woman, expecting a wolf at the very least.

“A Christmas tree!” cried the Ugly Child. He pointed. His strange little face glowed and his eyes sparkled. On the edge of the woods was a small tree so plump and pretty it would have made a model for any Christmas tree in the world. “What do we do?” cried the Child. “Now that we’ve found our Christmas tree?”

“We have to cut it and take it inside the house. You don’t think a body can have a proper Christmas tree out here beside the cow shed, do you?” In a moment the Old Woman fetched her ax, cut the tree, carried it into the house and stuck the end of the trunk in an old leaky bucket. And so it sat, beside the fireplace, green and wonderful. “Well,” said the Old Woman, “ it lacks a few things yet ...” And so she went about the house,

opening boxes and drawers and fumbling on shelves and under the bed. At last she had assembled a little pile of bright things, and had attached them to the tree. The tree fairly glowed.

The Ugly Child sighed. "It's beautiful," he said. "Now it must be time for the feast."

"Feast!" screamed the Old Woman. Let me tell you, you ugly brat, there hasn't been a scrap of food in this house in weeks!" The Ugly Child's face grew very still and sad. The Old Woman wrinkled her face and tried not to look at him. But it seemed she could see his ugly brown countenance even with her eyes closed. "Actually," she muttered, "I believe there is an old ham bone ... and maybe a potato or two." In a while the soup kettle was humming on the hearth. The Old Woman threw in a pinch of this and a pinch of that. "Um," she said, it might not be too bad if we had some bread to go with it. ... When the bread was mixed, raised, kneaded and kneaded again, the Old Woman patted it once for good luck and put it in the oven. "There, she announced, collapsing into her chair, "that takes care of that!"

"What about the presents?" asked the Ugly Child suddenly. "There should be a present for each of us under the tree."

"Here I am with an aching back and throbbing feet, having worked my fingers to the very bone to make a Christmas for you, and now you must have a present too! Oh," she cried, "Such an abominable child!" But she rattled off into a corner and there was the crackling of a bit of paper and a bustle of string, and finally, there it was, a present under the tree, just a silver buckle her mother had given her, the only thing of any

value she had left. Wondering why she was doing this, she hadn't noticed that the Ugly Child had rattled off into another corner, done some bustling of his own, and now there were two packages under the tree.

Soon supper was ready. The spoons clinked against the bowls, the bread crunched as they bit into it, the candle sputtered and the fire sparkled and the feast, if that was what it was, was merry. The Old Woman told a few jokes and the Ugly Child laughed. "Now it's time for you to open your gift" said the Old Woman at last. The Ugly Child took the gift, and when he opened it the smile that spread across his face. "A buckle" he shouted. "A silver buckle!" And he threw his arms around the Old Woman and hugged and kissed her until she was quite worn out. "I'll wear it forever" he said, you'll see."

Suddenly he fell silent. "I must go," he said. It's getting late." "Already?" cried the Old Woman. "But wait – we've not had any music yet – ." The Ugly Child opened the door. Across the snow came the sound of the village church bells, clear as birds calling through the winter night. "There is the music," said the Ugly child softly. "Good night, Old Woman," said the Ugly Child, "and thank you – thank you."

The Old Woman sat by the fire, rocking and grumbling. "What a day its been, Uproar," she said. Then she noticed the other gift lying under the tree. She bent down and picked it up, surprised at its great weight. Carefully she opened the string and lifted the paper, and as she did so, out came the sound of bells, and the sound of laughter, and the smell of ham-bone stew and baking bread, the light of a candle, the light of stars ...

“I’ll keep it forever,” the Old Woman said.”

ANTHEM

THE STORY OF A BIRTH

Luke:1-2.7

Carol O Little Town of Bethlehem # 246

Luke 2:8-14

Carol The First Noel # 237

Luke 2:15-17

Carol Go Tell It on the Mountain # 239

Luke 2: 18-19

Carol Joy To the World # 245

OFFERING & OFFERTORY

CALL TO FORM A CIRCLE

CANDLE LIGHTING

CAROL Silent Night # 251

**Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
round you virgin mother and child,
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.**

Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight,

**Glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent night, holy night, child of God love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
sleep in heavenly, sleep in heavenly peace.**

BENEDICTION

**Up in the sky, Star Mother had been watching for her Youngest
Child to come home At last she saw him, trudging up the long slope of the
great black night sky. She put on a shawl of moonlight and rushed out to
meet him. "Well, how did it go? Was it a happy day?"**

**Youngest Child sighed. "Oh, it was a lovely day" he told her sleepily.
"And I'm so tired."**

**"Wait," cried Star Mother. Tell me about it. Tell me all about
Christmas. Is that too much to ask?"**

"It was – oh, Mother" – Youngest Child yawned. "It was ,, enough."

And for all of you, may these holidays be, however simple, *enough*.

POSTLUDE