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Christmas Cradle, Christmas Cross

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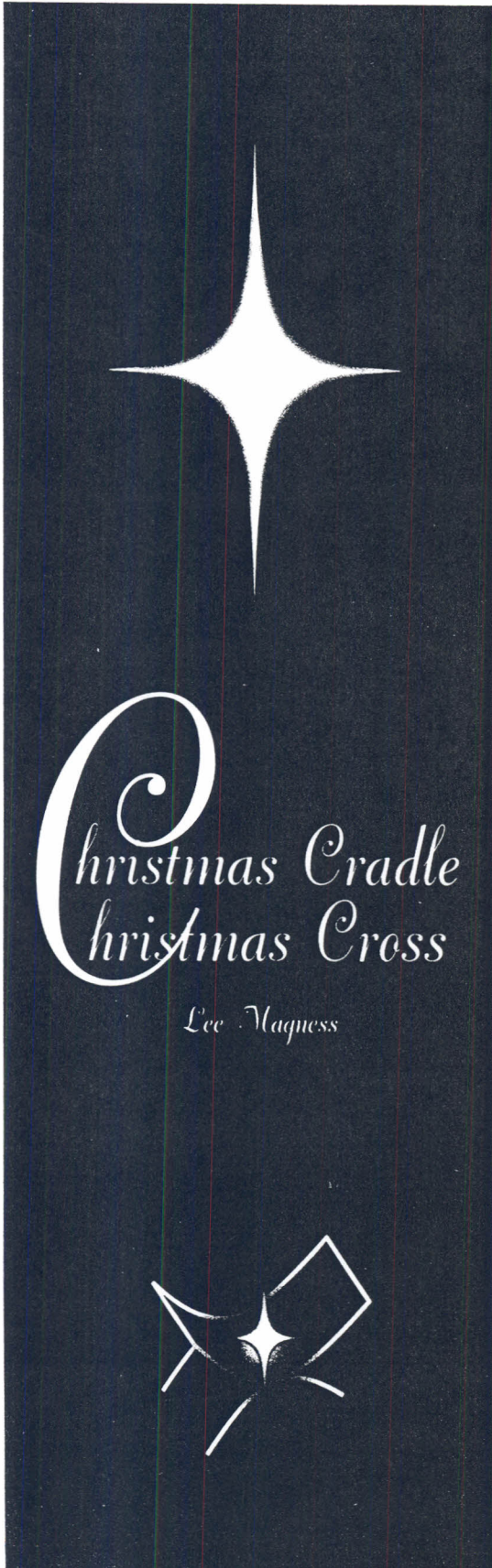


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Christmas Cradle, Christmas Cross is a sermon-length choral reading that explores how the full significance of Jesus' saving death and victorious resurrection is powerfully present even in the passages about his birth. The reading is printed for four readers but may be reconfigured for fewer or for a full choir.

Preface (1=female voice, 2=male voice)

1 In great pain Mary labored over God,
and suddenly in merciful agony,
2 *a man burst forth from the courtroom,
into the yard filled with a vicious mob.*

1 The mother knelt down
to wrap the baby in swaddling clothes,
2 *and they ripped them from his body,
and kneeling down gambled them away.*

1 And because there was no room in the inn,
she gently laid him
2 *on the wooden beams of a cross,
where they nailed his reaching hands.*

1 And the animals heard the baby,
and they drew near hoping to be fed,
and they bleated and bawled,
2 *Crucify him, Crucify him.*

1 And the shepherds on the hillside
came to see this thing
which they thought would soon be past,
2 and asked, *Are you the King of the Jews?*

1 And the wise men came to see Jesus:
one brought spices, another perfumes,
and a third removed his golden crown
2 *and jammed its thorns into his brow.*

1 And in that dark Judean night
the newborn baby cried out,
wanting protection from the cold wind,
2 *My God, my God, why have you forsaken
me?*

1 And as the star stopped over the manger,
there was darkness over the whole land,
and just before the baby fell asleep,
2 he softly cried, *It is finished.*

1 And in that moment of ghastly glory,
2 *when Mary lay exhausted with an empty
tomb,*

he said, *I am the resurrection and
the life,*
1 and in the next moment he redeemed the
time.

Stanza One

1 Just what is Christmas all about?
2 *You'd think we'd know by now.*
3 After all the Christmas sermons and Christ-
mas carols and Christmas cantatas you'd think we'd
know by now.
4 *But do we? Do we know what
Christmas is all about?*

1 Christmas is not all about a cave where
animals grazed and browsed on hay;
2 *it is also about a cave, a rich man's
grave, where a bruised body lay.*

3 Christmas is not all about Joseph of
Nazareth, who found that first shelter;
4 *it is also about Joseph of Arimathea
who provided the last, helter-skelter.*

1 Christmas is not all about Mary, weeping
with relief at her firstborn crying;
2 *it is also about Mary, weeping with
grief at her firstborn dying.*

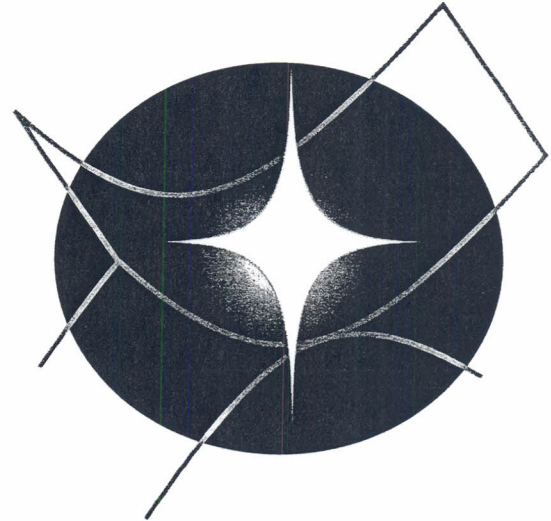
3 Christmas is not all about Simeon in the
temple saying, At last I have seen the Messiah;
4 *it is also about Simon in the court-
yard saying, I don't know him.*

1 Christmas is not all about a Roman emperor,
holding sway over the overtaxed Jewish masses;
2 *it is also about a Roman governor,
taxed and swayed by the overbearing Jewish masses.*

3 Christmas is not all about angels who sang,
Glory to God in the highest;
4 *it is also about angry crowds who
shouted, Crucify, Crucify.*

1 Christmas is not all about shepherds wide-
eyed at the sight of a cradled Messiah;
2 *it is also about Sadducees wild-eyed
at the sight of a crucified Messiah.*

3 Christmas is not all about swaddling clothes



that wrapped his chilly chubbiness;
4 *it is also about shrouds that
wrapped his cold corpse.*

1 Christmas is not all about a cradle, a manger
filled with fragrant forage in a stall;
2 *it is also about a cross where they
managed only some pungent vinegar-gall.*

3 In other words, Christmas is not all about a
birth, the birth of the son God gave;
4 *it is also about a death, the death of
the God who came to save.*

Stanza Two

1 But is it really there, this cradle/cross
connection?
2 *Is the cross really what the cradle is
all about?*

3 Is it just a figment of our overfertile imagi-
nations, our what-in-the-world-are-we-going-to-say-
about-Christmas-this-Christmas minds?
4 *Or does the pain of his death really
partake of the pangs of his birth?*

1 There's a shadow that lurks even in the
stories of glory—

2 *the fore-shadow of his death chilling the warmth of his birth,*
 3 like an icy wind groping through a gap in his baby clothes—
 4 *there's a connection, all right.*

1 The angel announced to the barely-betrothed Joseph,
 2 *She shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus,*
 34 for he will save his people from their sins.

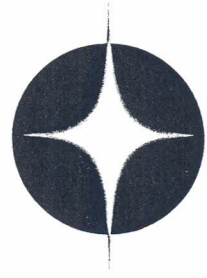
1 The tongue-(un)ted priest Zechariah prophesied of his about-to-be-born son,
 2 *You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High,*
 for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
 34 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

1 The angels found the fearfully brave shepherds and gloried on them in the fields
 of night, saying,
 2 *Today in the town of David,*
 34 a Savior has been born to you.

1 Death-defying and devout, old Simeon gave the baby a holy hug and said,
 34 For my eyes have seen your salvation,
 2 *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel,*
 1 and then he warned the marveling mother that the blessed event would bear bitter fruit:
 2 *Your son will be a sign to be spoken against*
 34 and a sword will pierce through your soul also.

1 His partner in God's time, Anna,
 2 *rejoiced that at last*
 34 she had seen the redemption of Israel.

1 Indeed here among mangers and magi,
 2 *stars and shepherds, angels and annunciations,*
 3 lies the painful point, the triumphant truth of Christmas:
 4 *cradle and cross, womb and tomb, birth and rebirth.*



Stanza Three

1 But just as surely as the cross stands in the corner of the stable stories,
 so Christmas re-echoes in the crucifixion.

2 We find the advent readily enough in the Gospel of Matthew,
 but it also lingers in the birthless Gospel of John:

3 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
 that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

4 We find the Nativity in the Gospel of Luke,
 but it also lingers in the letter to the Galatians:

1 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son,
 born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law.

2 We expect to find Christmas in the Gospels, and we do;
but it crouches even in Colossians:

3 He is the image of the unseen God, the firstborn over all creation.
For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,
and through him to reconcile to himself all things . . . ,
by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

4 And you'll even find the Christmas story,
you'll especially find the Christmas story, in Philippians:

1 Though he was in the form of God,
he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
2 *but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,*
being born in the likeness of men.
3 And being found in human form he humbled himself
4 *and became obedient unto death,*
1234 even death on a cross.

1 In other words, the cradle is not only about the birth of the God who came to be with us,
2 *it is also about the death of the God who came to save us.*
3 In other words, the cross is not only about the one who died to live,
4 *it is also about the one who was born to die.*

Stanza Four

1 So just what is Christmas all about?
To answer that question we must dismantle the Christmas cradle
and then reassemble it into the Christmas cross.

2 It's then that we begin to learn that Christmas really is joy to the world—
the joy of forgiveness that comes to human beings trapped in sin,
trapped in the sin of unforgiveness,
trapped in the sin of refusing to accept forgiveness.

3 It's then that we begin to learn that Christmas really is peace on earth—
the reconciliation that comes to human beings cut off from God,
alienated from one another,
estranged from ourselves.

4 It's then that we begin to learn that Christmas really is good will to all—
the good news that God's will is for salvation,
and that God's salvation is for us,
and for the restoration of the rest of the whole un-whole world.

1 God knew and God knows that our world is broken and needs the
wholeness that only incarnation plus salvation can bring.

2 Broken families, broken churches need Christmas,
1234 *need the God born to save.*



3 Broken hearts and broken bodies need Christmas,
1234 *need the God born to save.*

4 Broken confidences and broken friendships need Christmas,
1234 *need the God born to save.*

Conclusion

1 And so we call on each other at Christmastime
2 *not only to crowd around the cradle*
but to huddle around the cross.

1 We call on each other at Christmas
3 *not only to follow one Mary to the cave of Bethlehem*
but to follow another Mary to the crypt of Jerusalem.

1 We call on each other at Christmas
4 *not only to adore the Savior who came to life*
but to adore the Savior who came to life again.

1 And so, with the angels, we admonish one another,
Be not afraid,
2 *(of a birth or a death)*
1 for behold I bring you good news of great joy
3 *(a happy birth day and a happier rebirth day)*
1 which shall come to all people
4 *(to all the all-broken people)*
1 for to you is born this day
2 *(and reborn this day)*
1 in the city of David,
234 *a Savior who is Christ the Lord.*
1 And this will be a sign for you
3 *(a sign to be shouted out and to be spoken against)*
1 you will find the babe
4 *(the babe of the cradle and, at least for Mary, the babe of the*
cross)
1 wrapped in swaddling clothes
2 *(and in a shroud)*
1 and lying in a manger
3 *(and on a cross).*

1 It's springtime in December!
12 *It's Easter at Christmas!*
123 For unto us a child is born!
1234 *Hallelujah, he is risen!*

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