
“IN A BLEAK MIDWINTER” (1872) BY CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830- 1894)

Christina Rossetti, in 1872, wrote these words in response to a request from the magazine *Scribner’s Monthly* for a Christmas poem.

The music is “Cranham” by Gustav T. Holst (1906).

Musical performances: The Queen’s Six with Richard Pinel, *Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming* (2017); Sarah McLachlan, *Wintersong* (2006); Poella, *In the Bleak Midwinter (Piano & Poetry)*, (2019); James Taylor, *James Taylor at Christmas* (2006).

“Christina Rossetti wrote huge volumes of religious and secular poetry. It is helpful to remember that she wrote poems on Classical subjects as well as Christian; her vision was shaped by Italian masters like Dante, as much as by emergent Anglican pieties, and she wrote in Italian as well as in English. She lived through the emergent heights of the Victorian Empire (dying in 1894) as part of one of the most prominent artistic families in the land; if by 1872, when ‘In the Bleak Midwinter’ was published, her poetic attentions were increasingly and firmly fixed on devotional verse and subjects, she also had a rich cultural and personal grasp of life’s realities. Not only had she experienced the limits of being a middle-class woman in a patriarchal culture, she had experienced significant personal ill-health and familial loss.” [Rachel Mann. *In the Bleak Midwinter: Advent and Christmas with Christina Rossetti* (pp. 8-9). Canterbury Press Norwich. Kindle Edition.]

TEXT

In the bleak midwinter,¹
Frosty wind made moan,

¹ See: https://www.bible-history.com/geography/seasons_months_israel.html - In Israel the yearly cycle with its four seasons are not as clearly marked as the lands to the north of it. But to the Jew

Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter,
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold Him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak midwinter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim,
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk,
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

every season was a special time and a reminder of the promises of God, as He said to Noah "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter" (Genesis 8: 22). Though the Bible specifically mentions summer, winter, spring and autumn, it may come as a surprise to know that the Bible never mentions four seasons, but only two. The Hebrew word "*stav*", translated today as **autumn**, is mentioned only once in the Bible in the Song of Solomon: "for lo, the winter is passed, the rain is over and gone..." (Song 2:11), "*stav*" really speaks of the time of the winter rains. The Hebrew word "*aviv*", translated today as spring is mentioned twice in the Bible, both referring to a stage in the ripening of barley rather than a season. The month of Aviv (*hodesh ha'aviv*) is the time when this ripening of barley takes place, this is of course the Hebrew month of Nissan. **There is no mention of a season called spring anywhere in the Bible. Therefore we must conclude that the Bible only recognizes two seasons, summer and winter, or as the writers of the Talmud put it, "the days of sun" and "the days of rain."** And later in this article: "**January** - This is the coldest month, which brings with it dark and gloomy days and heavy rainfalls." Then see: <http://blog.adw.org/2014/07/what-was-the-climate-and-weather-of-israel-like-at-the-time-of-jesus/> - "The climate in Palestine both today and at the time of Jesus has *two distinct seasons*. **The wet or rainy season is from the middle of October to the middle of April. The dry or summer season lasts from the middle of June until the middle of September.** It is quite dry in these months and rainfall is very unusual."

Angels and archangels
 May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
 Thronged the air;
But only His mother,
 In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
 With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
 Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
 I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man,
 I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him,
 Give my heart.