

THE CHRISTMAS SAINT

"Tis Christmas, and o'er all this fair, broad earth
The bells again proclaim the royal birth.

It was in Bethlehem, in Judea,
Hundreds of years ago,
That Mary in her travail
Of anguish and of woe,
Felt that joyous heart-throb
Thrill to her inmost soul
With the first faint sound
Of that little cry,
And tears beyond control
Shed in joy, in rapture rather
With the thought of the gladsome gift
She had brought the world from heaven,
Men's sorrows to uplift.

Cradled once in lowly way
The King of Kings, the Prince of Peace
Even in a manger lay,
But the shepherds came to worship
And the wise men gathered too,
Bringing gifts of wondrous workmanship,
For very well they knew
Of the promise of the Christ child,
And guided by the star,
As they wandered o'er the desert
From their travelings afar
They sought the lowly manger
Where shone the light divine,
There the mother clasped her baby
And they called the place a shrine.

And so throughout the centuries
With love for that glad morn
Have men brought gifts and been
With kindness newly born,
And a greater love than ever
Permeates the heart, when
The Christmas bells are ringing
"Peace on earth good will to men."

The mother of that long ago,
A saint we deem her now;
And our fancy clothes her royally
With a halo o'er her brow
'Mid clouds of angels picture her
Reigning a gracious queen
For within her arms there nestled once
The child of Joseph's dream
The mother of the Savior!
Oh wondrous thought divine!
No wonder that sweet motherhood
Is called a holy shrine.

Could she have known the sorrow
The torture and despair
That waited for his manhood,
Like a thief within his lair,
Could she have seen the thorny crown
Have known how friends betrayed
Have dreamed of Calvary and the cross
Would she then have prayed
That a child might be given her
A child to call her own,
To care for and to cherish
In her fond heart alone?

Ah yes! and every mother
Since that sainted one of old
Feels those self-same heart throbs
When her babe she first enfolds
And the joy of the moment
Surmounts all future fears
As she clasps her little darling
And 'mid her smiles and tears
Casts aside all thoughts of sorrow
In this new-born joy so sweet --
The first kiss of her baby
From its mother's life, complete.

Yet life always has a shadow
And it deepens with the years,
And the mother, sees the outlines
First, through tender fears --
She wonders how the little steps will lengthen,
How the little mind will grow,
If life's struggles will be valiant
Or weak and vain and slow.
And from babyhood to manhood
Her thoughts but breathe a prayer
For the child that God has given
Unto her tender care.

What wonder that at Christmas
All the world is full of joy,
And the heart is full of gladness
For every girl and boy;
Is it alone the Christ child
That stirs the world to giving,
Or the sacred thought of mother
That actuates the living
To deeds of love and kindness,
To thoughts of peace divine?
Every Christmas more than ever
Is her knee a holy shrine.

All through our years of childhood
As we lisped our prayers of grace,
We remember how the lovelight
Shone through her dear, sweet face,
And every thought of mother
Is treasured as divine
And we surely make no error
When we call her a heart a shrine;
For our secrets safe are hid
Within its sacred wall
Where no key but love can open,
And so we do recall,
That always at the Christmas
When joys and gifts abound
And songs of praise, and words of peace
Are passing 'round,
That the saint we most adore,
And you'll grant there is no other
If each man the truth would tell
Is his own sweet, tender mother.

---Annie Wells Cannon

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