

Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity

John Milton
1608–1674

It was the Winter wilde,
While the Heav'n-born-childe,
All meanelly wrapt in the rude manger lies;

Nature in aw to him
Had doff't her gawdy trim, 5
With her great Master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun her lusty Paramour.

Only with speeches fair
She woo's the gentle Air 10
To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinfull blame,
The Saintly Vail of Maiden white to throw,
Confounded, that her Makers eyes 15
Should look so neer upon her foul deformities.

But he her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-eyd Peace,
She crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphear 20
His ready Harbinger,
With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
And waving wide her mirtle wand,
She strikes a universall Peace through Sea and Land.

No War, or Battails sound 25
Was heard the World around,
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hookèd Chariot stood
Unstain'd with hostile blood,
The Trumpet spake not to the armèd throng, 30
And Kings sate still with awfull eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

But peacefull was the night

Wherin the Prince of light
 His raig of peace upon the earth began: 35
 The Windes with wonder whist,
 Smoothly the waters kist,
 Whispering new joyes to the milde Ocean,
 Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
 While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmeèd wave. 40

The Stars with deep amaze
 Stand fixt in stedfast gaze,
 Bending one way their pretious influence,
 And will not take their flight,
 For all the morning light, 45
 Or Lucifer that often warn'd them thence;
 But in their glimmering Orbs did glow,
 Untill their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

And though the shady gloom
 Had given day her room, 50
 The Sun himself with-held his wonted speed,
 And hid his head for shame,
 As his inferiour flame,
 The new enlightn'd world no more should need;
 He saw a greater Sun appear 55
 Then his bright Throne, or burning Axletree could bear.

The Shepherds on the Lawn,
 Or ere the point of dawn,
 Sate simply chatting in a rustick row;
 Full little thought they than, 60
 That the mighty Pan
 Was kindly com to live with them below;
 Perhaps their loves, or els their sheep,
 Was all that did their silly thoughts so busie keep.

When such musick sweet 65
 Their hearts and ears did greet,
 As never was by mortall finger strook,
 Divinely-warbled voice
 Answering the stringèd noise,
 As all their souls in blisfull rapture took 70
 The Air such pleasure loth to lose,
 With thousand echo's still prolongs each heav'nly close.

Nature that heard such sound
 Beneath the hollow round
 Of Cynthia's seat, the Airy region thrilling, 75
 Now was almost won
 And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
 She knew such harmony alone
 Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union.
 To think her part was don,
 At last surrounds their sight
 A Globe of circular light,
 That with long beams the shame-fac't night array'd,
 The helmèd Cherubim
 And sworded Seraphim, 85
 Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displaid,
 Harping in loud and solemn quire,
 With unexpressive notes to Heav'ns new-born Heir.

 Such musick (as 'tis said)
 Before was never made, 90
 But when of old the sons of morning sung,
 While the Creator Great
 His constellations set,
 And the well-ballanc't world on hinges hung,
 And cast the dark foundations deep, 95
 And bid the weltring waves their oozy channel keep.

 Ring out ye Crystall spears,
 Once bless our human ears,
 (If ye have power to touch our senses so)
 And let your silver chime 100
 Move in melodious time;
 And let the Base of Heav'ns deep Organ blow
 And with your ninefold harmony
 Make up full consort to th'Angelike symphony.

 For if such holy Song 105
 Enwrap our fancy long,
 Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold,
 And speckl'd vanity
 Will sicken soon and die,
 And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould, 110
 And Hell it self will pass away,

And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Yea Truth, and Justice then
Will down return to men,
Th'enameld Arras of the Rain-bow wearing, 115
And Mercy set between,
Thron'd in Celestiall sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering,
And Heav'n as at som festivall,
Will open wide the Gates of her high Palace Hall. 120

But wisest Fate sayes no,
This must not yet be so,
The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss; 125
So both himself and us to glorifie:
Yet first to those ychain'd in sleep,
The wakefull trump of doom must thunder through the deep,

With such a horrid clang
As on mount Sinai rang 130
While the red fire, and smouldring clouds out brake:
The agèd Earth agast
With terrour of that blast,
Shall from the surface to the center shake;
When at the worlds last session, 135
The dreadfull Judge in middle Air shall spread his throne.

And then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is,
But now begins; for from this happy day
Th'old Dragon under ground 140
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurpèd sway,
And wrath to see his Kingdom fail,
Swindges the scaly Horror of his foulded tail.

The Oracles are dumm, 145
No voice or hideous humm
Runs through the archèd roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine

Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving. 150
No nightly trance, or breathèd spell,
Inspire's the pale-ey'd Priest from the prophetic cell.

The lonely mountains o're,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament; 155
From haunted spring, and dale
Edg'd with poplar pale,
The parting Genius is with sighing sent,
With flowre-inwov'n tresses torn
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn. 160

In consecrated Earth,
And on the holy Hearth,
The Lars, and Lemures moan with midnight plaint,
In Urns, and Altars round,
A drear, and dying sound 165
Affrights the Flamins at their service quaint;
And the chill Marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat

Peor, and Baalim,
Forsake their Temples dim, 170
With that twise-batter'd god of Palestine,
And moonèd Ashtaroth,
Heav'ns Queen and Mother both,
Now sits not girt with Tapers holy shine,
The Libyc Hammon shrinks his horn, 175
In vain the Tyrian Maids their wounded Thamuz mourn.

And sullen Moloch fled,
Hath left in shadows dred,
His burning Idol all of blackest hue,
In vain with Cymbals ring, 180
They call the grisly king,
In dismall dance about the furnace blue;
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis and Orus, and the Dog Anubis hast.

Nor is Osiris seen 185
In Memphian Grove, or Green,
Trampling the unshowr'd Grasse with lowings loud:

Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest,
Naught but profoundest Hell can be his shroud, 190
In vain with Timbrel'd Anthems dark
The sable-stolèd Sorcerers bear his worshipt Ark.

He feels from Juda's Land
The dredged Infants hand,
The rayes of Bethlehem blind his dusky eyn; 195
Nor all the gods beside,
Longer dare abide,
Not Typhon huge ending in snaky twine:
Our Babe to shew his Godhead true,
Can in his swadling bands controul the damnèd crew. 200

So when the Sun in bed,
Curtain'd with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an Orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale,
Troop to th'infernall jail, 205
Each fetter'd Ghost slips to his severall grave,
And the yellow-skirted Fayes,
Fly after the Night-steeds, leaving their Moon-lov'd maze.

But see the Virgin blest,
Hath laid her Babe to rest. 210
Time is our tedious Song should here have ending,
Heav'ns youngest teemèd Star,
Hath fixt her polisht Car,
Her sleeping Lord with Handmaid Lamp attending:
And all about the Courtly Stable, 215
Bright-harnest Angels sit in order serviceable.