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# BETHLEHEM

A MYSTERY

058479

FOR SOLI, CHORUS, AND ORCHESTRA

THE WORDS WRITTEN BY

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THE MUSIC COMPOSED BY

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(Op. 49.)

THE PIANOFORTE ARRANGEMENT BY  
BATTISON HAYNES.

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## NOTE.

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THE term "Mystery," in its special and ancient application to religious Drama, is here used because it more clearly indicates the nature of the work than would the wider designation, "Oratorio."

Some authority for the descriptive passages, such as the words of the opening chorus, may be discovered in the fact that certain of the ancient Mysteries had a part for an Expositor, who supplemented the action of the drama. The introduction of such passages is believed to be advantageous from a musical point of view.

The two Acts, or Parts, are each complete in itself, and adapted for separate performance.

# BETHLEHEM.

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## ACT I.

### IN THE FIELDS OF BETHLEHEM.

**An Angel, descending from Heaven, appeareth  
to certain Shepherds of Bethlehem.**

Darkness o'er the earth is brooding,  
Silence reigns, no voice intruding  
On the solemn midnight peace.  
Wrapped are all the sheep in slumber  
'Neath the stars—a countless number,  
Eyes that watch and never cease.

Worn the shepherds are and weary  
With their vigil dark and dreary;  
Heavy eyelids long to close.  
They, on danger unreflecting,  
They, Heaven's myst'ry unsuspecting,  
Bow the tired head and doze.

All the earth lies calmly sleeping,  
Mute is e'en the voice of weeping  
For man's violence and wrong!  
Nature at the silence wonders,  
And, affrighted, grasps her thunders—  
God's restraining arm is strong.

See, the jewell'd gates celestial  
Facing this our globe terrestrial,  
On their hinges forward swing!  
O the splendour out-proceeding!  
To the earth a pathway leading,  
Fit for envoys of a king.

Through the light, he light emitting,  
See an Angel, swiftly fitting,  
Pause o'er Bethlehem's sacred field!  
Darkness flies on wings of terror,  
While the silly sheep, in error,  
Rise to crop the dewy yield.

But the shepherds, sudden waking,  
Cry to one another, quaking,  
All their blood with fear congealed.

**The Shepherds cry aloud in their terror.**

O brothers, quick arise!  
Above us, in the skies,  
What flame of dreadful import blazes?  
Than noon-tide glare more bright,  
A strange, unearthly light  
From spangled heaven the stars erases!

Ah! see what living thing,  
On wide-outstretchèd wing,  
Like silvery cloud the earth is nearing!  
Majestical it sweeps  
Through air's profoundest deeps,  
A radiant course as hither steering.

O brothers, bend the knee,  
For that dread form we see  
Proceedeth from the Power supernal!  
Why cometh one of those  
Whose place, in glittering rows,  
Is near the throne of God eternal?

**The Angel comforteth the Shepherds with  
good news.**

Be not afraid!  
No sword is in my hand,  
As once, when through the fated land,  
Sent by an angry God, I, dreadful, passed.  
His vengeance, laid  
Asleep by mercy's charm,  
Will never more work mortals harm,  
Till they, self-doomed, reject Him at the last.

To you I bring  
Such news of glad surprise  
Shall brim with happy tears your eyes,  
And fill your souls with overpowering light.  
The world will ring  
With loud, acclaiming shout—  
Which, echoing 'mong Hell's rabble rout,  
Shall scare to loathsome caves, and dens of  
night.

Hail, wondrous Birth  
 Of God's incarnate Son!  
 To David's city, Shepherds, run,  
 And there your Saviour see in infant guise;  
 With decent mirth  
 To Christ the Lord draw near;  
 Him worship, while, from voices clear  
 And grateful hearts let song impassioned rise.

Lo! this the sign  
 By which the Babe to know—  
 Though King of all, nor pomp, nor show  
 Attends majestic at His earthly throne.  
 The Child divine  
 In ox's manger lies,  
 His glory veiled from mortal eyes,  
 Yet awful more than as by angels known.

### The Shepherds behold a multitude of the Heavenly Host.

O wondrous sight! with waving wings  
 The air is filled, and beauteous forms  
 Of lustrous sheen each moment brings  
 To view. As when, in time of storms,  
 Clouds upon clouds embattled rise,  
 And take their ordered place, ere lightnings  
 pierce the skies.

Far back they stretch along the shining way  
 That earth-ward leadeth from the heavenly  
 coast;  
 In dazzling splendour burns the bright array,  
 Rank over rank descending, host on host;  
 And now their radiant faces we behold,  
 And rapture kindled eyes that speak of joy  
 untold.

See how the silver trumpets flash like fire!  
 How golden harps gleam soft in seraph  
 hands!  
 While to their Leader the celestial quire  
 Converge, and marshal all their vocal bands.  
 Now, heavenly music shall be heard on earth,  
 Praising in notes undreamed before the Holy  
 Birth.

### The Angels sing an Anthem.

Glory to God!  
 The everlasting song  
 Of Heaven's great choral throng  
 In tenfold power and majesty ascendeth  
 Where, on His throne of might,  
 'Mid uncreated light,  
 He sits Whose loving-kindness never endeth.

Glory to God!  
 Angels adore and praise,  
 In loud, expressful lays,  
 The goodness which to man salvation giveth.  
 Hither we bring the sound,  
 That earth's remotest bound  
 May swell the song to Him who ever liveth.

Glory to God!  
 O sad, despairing world,  
 The battle-flag is furled,  
 The messenger of peace his trumpet bloweth;  
 Thy panoply of fight  
 Put off before His might,  
 Whose love resistless like a river floweth.

### The Celestial Quire returneth to Heaven.

#### Angels.

Glory to God!  
 The everlasting song  
 Of Heaven's great choral throng  
 In tenfold power and majesty ascendeth  
 Where, on His throne of might,  
 'Mid uncreated light,  
 He sits Whose loving-kindness never endeth.

#### Shepherds.

O leave us not, ye Shining Ones!  
 The heavenly light fast fades,  
 And shadows 'mong the glades  
 Resume their midnight reign.  
 Whence it hath trembling lain  
 In deepest caverns, Darkness runs.

Alas! all useless is our cry!  
 For now the circling rings  
 Of rhythmic-beating wings  
 Contract their mighty round,  
 While faint the anthem's sound,  
 And fainter yet, falls from on high.

See how, like points of lessening light,  
 Through Heaven's gate they go,  
 In order, row on row,  
 While from eclipse of fear  
 The stars once more appear,  
 And o'er the world again broods Night.

### The Shepherds talk together of the wondrous sight. The dawn appeareth.

#### First Shepherd (Baritone).

Our father Jacob, blessed of the Lord,  
 Beheld a ladder reaching to the sky;  
 And up and down the angels passed thereon,  
 His will fulfilling Who is God most High.

*Chorus of Shepherds.*

Lo, Jacob looked on creatures of a dream—  
 A vision born of slumber in the night!  
 But we with open eyes have seen Heaven's  
 host,  
 In radiance celestial, burning bright!

*Second Shepherd.—Tenor.*

Elisha gazed upon the company  
 That bore Elijah from his straining view,  
 While burning chariots, horses as of fire,  
 Through all the air like blazing meteors flew.

*Chorus of Shepherds.*

But we have seen the angels in array,  
 Like silver clouds the midnight heavens  
 emblaze;  
 And heard the glowing strains of song divine,  
 That did our ears with mystery amaze!

*First Shepherd.*

O brothers, favoured of the Lord are we,  
 To whom He hath revealed His wondrous  
 grace!

*Second Shepherd.*

Obeying, let us now to Bethle'm go,  
 And see our blessed Saviour face to face.

*Chorus of Shepherds.*

Doth Israel's Hope appear in infant guise?  
 And for His throne an ox's manger take?  
 Can helpless childhood Zion's strength restore?  
 And into fragments Rome's world-empire  
 break?

*First Shepherd.*

Long years ago, the Prophet cried, "To us  
 A Child is born, a Son is given; His Name  
 The Prince of Peace, the Wonderful, the  
 Lord!"

This Babe portentous, He is sure the same!

*Second Shepherd.*

'Twas also said that little Bethlehem  
 Should stand 'mong Judah's cities first and  
 best;  
 That out of her should come the Saving Christ,  
 The Sent of God to give His people rest.

*Chorus of Shepherds.*

Enough; the Word that now we see fulfilled  
 Is ever sure, no tittle passeth by,  
 To Bethlem let us go and worship there  
 The Royal Child, the Day-Star from on high.

The people gather together. The Shepherds  
 and folk of Bethlehem rejoice and sing  
 a Carol.

Uplift a song of praise!  
 As in the ancient days,  
 A Prince sits high on Israel's throne!  
 Th' expected Christ is here!  
 (O news of joy and fear!)  
 The day is come; the night hath flown!

Jerusalem, a crown of sorrow  
 Long hath girt thy regal head,  
 All thy wailing  
 Unavailing;  
 As to-day was each to-morrow,  
 Hopeless, like the buried dead.

Mournful Zion, stay thy weeping,  
 From the ashes now arise.  
 Troubles ended,  
 Garments splendid  
 With thy fortune are in keeping,  
 Song and dance and festive guise.

Now let th' oppressor fear;  
 Avails nor bow nor spear  
 Against the Infant born this night!  
 Through the Pretorian host  
 The tremors of the lost  
 Proclaim him routed ere the fight!

Uplift a song of praise!  
 As in the ancient days,  
 A Prince sits high on Israel's throne!  
 Th' expected Christ is here!  
 (O news of joy and fear!)  
 The day is come; the night hath flown!

## ACT II.

## IN BETHLEHEM.

Cometh a Heavenly Legion to guard the  
 New-born King.

Upon the quiet of the night,  
 Breaketh the noise of sword and shield,  
 As though a warrior-host passed by,  
 Clashing the weapons that they wield.  
 Hark to the measured tramp of feet,  
 And loud, clear tones of high command!  
 See what tall forms in shining ranks,  
 Each like a radiant pillar, stand!

These are the armed Cherubim;  
 But one is there of loftier crest  
 And prouder mien, whose panoply  
 Dims the fair splendour of the rest:

Abdiel he, who once, time past,  
Of Eden's flowery bounds held ward,  
And, now, the Infant King of Heaven  
Is charged to keep in faithful guard.

He speaks! out flash the flaming swords,  
While spears their glittering heads uplift;  
Silent the heavenly legion stands,  
And waits to yield obedience swift.  
"Comrades, a stable poor and mean—  
The palace is of our great King!  
Around it some stand sentinel,  
Thither let pass no evil thing;  
Some circle in the air above,  
Lest our old foes be on the wing."

The ranks break into ordered march,  
Or to aerial watch aspire;  
Now dark the lowly stable stands  
Amid engirding points of fire.

**In the Stable. The Blessed Mother  
singeth to her Babe.**

"Sleep, sweet Babe, my cares beguiling,  
Mother sits beside Thee smiling;  
Sleep, my darling, tenderly.  
If Thou sleep not, mother mourneth,  
Singing as her wheel she turneth,  
Come, soft slumber, balmily."\*

Droop the little eyelids gently;  
Mother keeps her watch intently;  
While she waketh, rest secure.  
Comes the first of many morrows,  
Comes the future with its sorrows,  
Mother's love shall aye endure.

**The Shepherds, with some People of  
Bethlehem, seek the Holy Babe through  
the City.**

*The People of Bethlehem.*

Tell us again the wondrous story!  
The Angel whom ye saw in glory,  
Did he of surety say,  
"To you is born this day  
A Saviour?"—long foretold by prophets hoary?

*First Shepherd.*

Lo, now! think ye we lay dreaming?  
That the silver wings were seeming?  
That no celestial sound  
Echoed the world around,  
While heavenly radiance through the night  
was gleaming?

\* This stanza is a translation, by Coleridge, of a Latin verse inscribed beneath a picture of the Virgin and Child.

Lead us where the Christ abideth,  
Where God's Light His splendour hideth?  
Born of David's line  
Is the King Divine,  
Who o'er our Israel's foes to victory rideth!

Thanks and praise from all ascending,  
Laud we now the happy ending  
Of our darkness drear,  
Of our night of fear;  
Oh! hail your Saviour, 'fore His throne low  
bending!

*People.*

But where is He, and where His throne?  
Here is no palace for a King!  
No royal Babe to us is known!

*A Woman.*

Now listen to a wondrous thing!  
A woman out of Galilee,  
Doth nurse a babe was born last night,  
And with her husband, Joseph hight,  
Lies in a stable lowly.

She comes of royal David's race,  
Yet meek and gentle is her mien!  
Oh! favoured of high heaven, I ween,  
No earthly light makes fair her face:

While, at the birthing of her Child,  
Strange sights and sounds observèd were,  
As of some angels watching there,  
And warding off all things defiled!

*People.*

Doth Israel's King in stable lie?

*First Shepherd.*

Did David keep his father's sheep?  
The counsel of our God is deep,  
And oft the lowly raiseth high.  
Unto the stable hasten now,  
And there in meetest homage bow.

*All.*

Thanks and praise from all ascending,  
Laud we here the happy ending  
Of our darkness drear,  
Of our night of fear!  
Oh! hail the Saviour, 'fore His throne low  
bending.



**The Shepherds and People come to worship  
the Holy Child.**

*The Blessed Mother.*

Darkness hill and plain forsaking,  
All the earth to life is waking,  
Sweetest Babe, the day is breaking ;  
When the sun shall rise,  
Ope thy tender eyes.

There my true life-light abideth,  
There a solemn myst'ry hideth,  
That e'en me from Thee divideth !  
Child of Heaven art Thou !  
At Thy feet I bow.

Round the little head it seemeth  
That a lustrous circlet gleameth,  
Like a starry crown it beameth !  
My Babe shall be a King ;  
All men His praise will sing.

*The Shepherds and People (Entering).*

Where is the Christ-Child ?  
Let us adore Him !  
Kneel we, O Mother mild,  
Humbly before Him.

*The Blessed Mother.*

Seek ye the Christ-Child  
Here, in a stable ?  
Who hath your minds beguiled ?  
What cunning fable ?

*First Shepherd.—Tenor.*

Are we beguiled ? 'tis by God's angel bright,  
Who, as we kept the watches of the night,  
Came floating downward on a silver ray,  
That streamed from Heaven and turned the  
dark to day.

O gracious sight ! yet we in terror cried,  
As men who dread the fate may soon betide ;  
"Nay, fear ye not," the Angel gently said,  
"Good news I bring," and bowed his stately  
head.

"Good news to you, and, all who dwell on  
earth,  
Fair tidings of a Saviour's glorious birth !  
To Bethlehem haste, and in a manger, see  
The Christ Who shall your blest Redeemer be !

Then, as we silent heard, in great amaze,  
More radiant splendour in the sky 'gan blaze !  
To deepest caverns fled the wondering night,  
And all the host of Heaven appeared in sight !

Some haups and trumpets bare, and some did  
raise  
Celestial voices in a hymn of praise ;  
"Glory to God," they sang, "'mong men be  
peace."  
And earth flung back the sound with loud  
increase.

*The Blessed Mother (Exultant).*

Lord God of Israel, Who in ages past,  
With mighty arm and strong  
O'ercamest those that wrought us wrong,  
Thy mercy still through endless years doth last.

How marv'llous art Thou in Thy works and  
ways !

Of me, a maid unknown,  
Is born the King Who David's throne  
Shall make majestic as in ancient days.

"He shall be great," the glorious Angel said,  
"His Kingdom shall endure  
Unto remotest ages sure !"  
O Zion, lift again thy drooping head !

Jerusalem belov'd, from dust arise ;  
Put on thy beautiful attire  
And strike the sacred lyre  
That now in silence and in darkness lies.

*The Blessed Mother, Shepherds, and People.*

O Holy Babe ! O Majesty Divine !  
To Thee the psalm we sing,  
And wake to praise the sounding string :  
Thy light has come, dear Zion, rise and shine.

[*The Blessed Mother and people kneel in silent  
adoration.*]

**Certain Kings from the East seek the  
Holy Babe.**

From the far land of the morning ;  
From an ancient land and hoary,  
Rich in song, renowned in story,  
We have come, all danger scorning.

See the Star hath led us hither ;  
Through fierce deserts, over mountains,  
Bare of herb and bubbling fountains,  
We have followed, heedless whither.

Tell us where the King abideth,—  
He of majesty eternal,  
He who, armed with might supernal,  
O'er His foes to victory rideth !

We would humbly kneel before Him  
And of treasures make oblation ;  
Since hath come the world's Salvation,  
Meet it is that we adore Him.

**The Blessed Mother maketh Answer.**

This the palace of the King!  
 Here behold His cradle-throne!  
 Do the Gentiles tribute bring,  
 And my Babe their Sovereign own!

One fold, one Shepherd shall there be,  
 One Prince and Lord to rule the earth;  
 Thou most Holy Child art He!  
 Distant nations hail Thy birth.

**The Kings marvel, and offer Gifts.**

O sight of awe and mystery!  
 His palace is this stable poor,  
 His throne, that shall for aye endure,  
 The ox's manger here we see!

Kingly tribute now we offer,  
 Child of the Star!  
 Gold and spices here we proffer,  
 Brought from afar!  
 And, in worship lowly bending,  
 Sing Thee with a song unending.

Gold, by searching flame refinèd,  
 See at Thy feet,  
 Wrought to forms with art designèd,  
 Gracious and meet.  
 Here is frankincense sweet smelling;  
 Myrrh, of rarest odours telling.

Thus we do Thee homage royal,  
 Child of the Star!  
 Thus we pledge Thee service loyal,  
 Brought from afar.  
 And, in worship lowly bending,  
 Sing Thee with a song unending.

**The Blessed Mother, the Kings, Shepherds, and People join in adoration of the Holy Babe.**

Lo! this is He of Whom the Prophets spake  
 In times of old,  
 And struck their harps of gold,  
 Hymning His praise Who "should come" for  
 our sake!

And this is He shall tread in dust the crest  
 Of hell's fierce lord;  
 Sheathing the flaming sword  
 That long hath barred return to Eden's rest.

In light prophetic to our eyes appears  
 A happier world;  
 For ever now are furled  
 The battle flags of sad and weary years.

O Wonderful! O Holy Child!  
 The Mighty God! the Prince of Peace!  
 Of Thy blest government's increase  
 No end shall be.  
 Eternally

The earth shall flourish 'neath Thy Sceptre  
 mild.

Son of David! King and Lord!  
 Child of the prophetic Word!  
 Conquering and to conquer ride,  
 Till all nations shall abide  
 'Neath the shadow of Thy throne,  
 Thee as Sovereign Ruler own.

Come, in the fulness of time, O years  
 Of plentiful harvest and song;  
 Now, on our darkness of sorrow and tears,  
 Now, on our night-time of anguish and fears,  
 Dawns the Light we have waited for long.  
 Shine forth, Thou Sun, with ever-quickening  
 ray,  
 'Till burns the glory of the perfect day.

\* Omitted in composition.

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