



“All Who Seek a Christmas Treasure”: Paul Gerhardt’s Christmas Lullaby

FREDERICK J. GAISER

The recent complete edition of Paul Gerhardt’s works includes two Advent hymns and seven Christmas hymns among his 139 German hymns and poems.¹ Of these, all but one have appeared in a documented English translation.² The lone exception is a sweet lullaby or cradlesong, “All Who Seek a Christmas Treasure” (“Alle, die ihr, Gott zu ehren”).³ We learn something of Gerhardt’s piety with the realization that he wrote almost as many hymns for Lent and Holy Week (fourteen) as for Advent, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost combined (fifteen).

The Advent and Christmas hymns demonstrate clearly how Gerhardt “gave sound and sense, taste and touch, flavor and feeling to the confessional truths of

¹Paul Gerhardt, *Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe: Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Lieder und Gedichte*, ed. Eberhard von Cranach-Sichart (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2004).

²Two of these hymns appear in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELCA): “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” (#241) and “All My Heart Again Rejoices” (#273); *Christian Worship* (WELS) and *Lutheran Service Book* (LCMS) each add two more: “O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is” (#40 and 372, respectively) and “Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising” (#42 and 375, resp.).

³See Theodore Brown Hewitt, *Paul Gerhardt as a Hymnwriter and His Influence on English Hymnody* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918) 167–169. Hewitt lists the known English translations as of 1918, but a search of subsequent literature reveals no translation of this hymn. A recent Luther Seminary MSM graduate, Mark Spitzack, has a handwritten English version that has been passed down in his family, and, of course, there may be other similar examples, but no published version has surfaced.

To observe the 400th anniversary of the birth of Lutheran preacher and hymn writer Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), Word & World has published new translations of Gerhardt hymns in each 2007 issue. As the last in that series we offer here Gerhardt’s Christmas Lullaby, hitherto unavailable in English.

the Reformation.”⁴ In these festival hymns, as he does throughout his hymnody, Gerhardt clearly and objectively proclaims the Christian gospel while at the same time portraying the personal response of the Christian believer. The two aspects come together fully, for example, in “O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is”: “O Jesus Christ, / Your manger is / My paradise where my soul is reclining. / For there, O lord, / We find the Word / Made flesh for us—your grace is brightly shining.”⁵

“All Who Seek a Christmas Treasure” is particularly poignant. Gerhardt calls it a “Christ-Wiegenlied” (Christ’s “cradlesong” or “lullaby”). We overhear Mary singing the newborn baby to sleep in language personal and tender on the one hand (“Sleep, my child, so pure, so small”), lofty and glorious on the other (“Sleep, my hope, O choice supernal, Sleep, O paradise eternal”). The hymn has been called Gerhardt’s version of the medieval Roman Catholic tradition of “Kindelwiegen” (“cradle-rocking”), in which people playing Mary and Joseph introduced the baby Jesus in song and action, similar in some ways apparently to our own Christmas pageants.⁶ Priests, choir, and laity all participated in the popular cradle-rocking and singing, allowing personal participation in the Christmas story.⁷ Although rejected by some Protestants as superstition, the custom retained its popularity among others. Traces show up for Gerhardt not only in this Christmas lullaby, but also in another Christmas hymn, “Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier.” The first stanza reads: “Here at your manger now I stand, / Jesus, my life, my leaven. / I come with gifts held in my hand, / All which you first have given. / Receive my spirit and my heart, / My soul and mind, my every part, / May you, Lord, find them pleasing.”⁸

Gerhardt’s lullaby is his own free rendition of a 1638 version of an earlier Latin hymn by Johann Stadlmayr, then choirmaster to Archduchess Claudia of Innsbruck.⁹ Stadlmayr’s rhythm and melody were retained by Gerhardt, along with his choral/instrumental style of accompaniment. My English translation reverts to the Latin rhyme scheme in which the final couplet rhymes (lines six and nine, interrupted by “Eia”)—a scheme only partially followed by Gerhardt in the German text. Mary’s lovingly urgent call to “Sleep” is addressed to the baby thirty-four times in Gerhardt’s six stanzas, a refrain that marks the sound and sense of the hymn throughout. My translation retains each of these in its same location.¹⁰

⁴See Frederick J. Gaiser, “‘I Sing to You and Praise You’ (Psalm 30): Paul Gerhardt and the Psalms,” *Word & World* 27/2 (2007) 196.

⁵Paul Gerhardt, “O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is,” trans. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 1941, in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1993) #40, stanza 1.

⁶Hermann Petrich, *Paul Gerhardt: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1914) 216.

⁷For more on the custom of “Kindelwiegen,” see Clement Miles, *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition, Christian and Pagan* (London: Unwin, 1912) 108–112; available online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/time/crt/crt07.htm> (accessed 6 August 2007).

⁸Paul Gerhardt, “Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier,” in *Wach auf*, 46–49 (my translation).

⁹Petrich, *Paul Gerhardt*, 217. The Latin text is available in this volume at page 348.

¹⁰I am grateful to colleagues Paul Westermeyer and Kristin Rongstad for laying out the melody in the form presented here. Professor Westermeyer has served as a gracious consultant for all my work on Gerhardt over the past year.

PAUL GERHARDT, "ALL WHO SEEK A CHRISTMAS TREASURE":
CRADLESONG FOR THE CHRIST CHILD

Tune: QUI ADSTATIS, ADSPIRATIS, Johann Stadlmayr (ca. 1575–1648)¹¹

1
All who seek a Christmas treasure,
To God's glory, for our pleasure,
Eia, eia,
Stop and listen, cease all other,
To the song of God's own mother
At the cradle of her son:
Eia, eia,
Sleep and slumber,
Sleep, sleep, dearest little one.

2
Sleep, dear Prince, of nations couns'ler,
Bridegroom, son, of faith our father.
Eia, eia,
Here a bed within this stable,
All prepared, as I am able;
Sleep, my child, so pure, so small.
Eia, eia,
Sleep and slumber,
Sleep, sleep, now, my heart, my all.

3
Sleep, my crown, my life, my splendor;
All I have to you I tender.
Eia, eia,
Sleep, O gift that makes us wealthy,
Rest and nurse, grow strong and healthy,
Here in this poor manger bare.
Eia, eia,
Sleep and slumber,
Sleep, sleep, you, my praise most fair.

1
Alle, die ihr, Gott zu ehren,
Unsre Christlust wollt vermehren,
Eya, eya,
Steht und hört vor allen Dingen
Gottes Mutter fröhlich singen
Bei dem Kripplein ihres Sohns:
Eya, eya,
Schlaf und ruhe,
Schlaf, schlaf, liebes Jesulein!

2
Schlaf, du großer Weltberater,
Bräutigam, Sohn und selbst auch Vater,
Eya, eya,
Bett und Lager, das dich trägt,
Hab ich dir zurecht geleet,
Schlaf, du schönstes Kindelein!
Eya, eya,
Schlaf und ruhe,
Schlaf, schlaf, trautes Herzelein!

3
Schlaf, mein Krönlein! Licht und Leben,
Was dir lieb, will ich dir geben,
Eya, eya,
Schlaf, du Ausbund aller Gaben,
Laß dich speisen, laß dich laben
Bei den armen Krippen hier!
Eya, eya,
Schlaf und ruhe,
Schlaf, schlaf, du mein Ehr und Ruhm!

¹¹The tune appears as no. 7362 in Johannes Zahn, *Die Melodien der deutschen evangelischen Kirchenlieder, aus den Quellen geschöpft und mitgeteilt*, vol. 4 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1891) 390–391. The setting there, which follows here, is by Johan Georg Ebeling (1667), based on Stadlmayr's original.

4

Sleep, dear child, my own, my fortune,
Sleep, my son, my pearl, my portion,

Eia, eia,

Sleep! To you, the one I dandle,
Milk and honey hold no candle;
Sleep as our most noble guest.

Eia, eia,

Sleep and slumber,
Sleep, sleep, matchless lily, rest.

5

Sleep, for God the Father chose you;
Sleep, for I, your mother, bore you;

Eia, eia,

Sleep, our spirits' consolation,
Sleep, my joy, my heart's elation,
Sleep, fruit of my womb, my dove.

Eia, eia,

Sleep and slumber,
Sleep, sleep, Jesus, sweetest love.

6

Now, I make your bed, though homely,
Strewn with flowers bright and comely;

Eia, eia,

Sleep, my hope, O choice supernal,
Sleep, O paradise eternal,
Sleep, true bread of life, true worth.

Eia, eia,

Sleep and slumber,
Sleep, sleep, Savior of the earth.

4

Schlaf, o bestes aller Güter,
Schlaf, o Perle der Gemüter.

Eya, eya,

Schlaf mein Trost, dem nichts zu gleichen,
Milch und Honig muß dir weichen,
Schlaf, du edler Herzensgast!

Eya, eya,

Schlaf und ruhe,
Schlaf, schlaf, werte Lilienblum!

5

Schlaf, o Kind, den Gott erkoren,
Schlaf, o Schatz, den ich geboren,

Eya, eya,

Schlaf, du frommer Seelen Weide,
Schlaf, du frommer Herzen Freude,
Schlaf, du meines Leibes Frucht!

Eya, eya,

Schlaf und ruhe,
Schlaf, schlaf, allersüß'stes Lieb!

6

Ich will dir dein Bettlein zieren,
Ganz mit Blumen überführen,

Eya, eya,

Schlaf, du Lust, die wir erwählen,
Schlaf, du Paradies der Seelen,
Schlaf, du wahres Himmelsbrot!

Eya, eya,

Schlaf und ruhe,
Schlaf, schlaf, Heiland aller Welt!

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Text from Paul Gerhardt, *Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe: Vollständige Ausgabe seiner Lieder und Gedichte*, ed. Eberhard von Cranach-Sichart (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 2004) 52–54.

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ALL WHO SEEK A CHRISTMAS TREASURE

Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676); trans. Frederick J. Gaiser (1937–)

Tune: QUIADSATIS, ASPIRATIS, Johann Stadlmayr (ca. 1575–1648); setting Johan Georg Ebeling (1637–1676)

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It consists of six systems of music. Each system has a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are: "All who seek a Christmas treasure, To God's glory, for our pleasure, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Stop and listen, cease all other, To the song of God's own mother At the cradle of her son: Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Sleep and slumber, Sleep, sleep, dearest little one." The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

All who seek a Christmas treasure, To God's glo - ry, for our plea-sure,
 Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a,
 Stop and list - en, cease all oth - er, To the song of God's own moth - er
 At the crad - le of her son: Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a,
 Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Ei - a, ei - a, Sleep and slum - ber,
 21 Sleep, sleep, dear - est lit - tle one.