



Grand Commandery of Minnesota

## Knights Templar

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I write this, the days have gone short, almost before my eyes. Trees are nearly bare; the lingering leaves cling tenaciously to their life-giving ash, oak, and maple and are going out, defiantly, in a blaze of glory. The remaining daylight hours are precious even as they dwindle down, shorter and shorter, as the winds blow colder and colder. The steady march toward winter is inevitable, and the coming months of cold, snow and ice look bleak.

Christina Rosetti (1830-1894) is widely considered one of the great poets of the Victorian era. Her poem "A Christmas Carol" was published in the January 1872 issue of *Scribner's Monthly*. Today, when we hear the title "A Christmas Carol", we think of a ghost story about Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob and Tiny Tim Cratchit and the like, as penned by Charles Dickens. Rosetti's poem is now commonly referred to by its first line: In the Bleak Midwinter. The composition's five stanzas follow below. **A Christmas Carol**, By Christina Rossetti

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
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 As 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,  
Breastful of milk, and a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom angels fall before,  
The ox and ass and camel which adore.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;  
But His mother only, 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.—

You've probably heard this poem in the Advent and Christmas seasons, set to music by Gustav Holst or Harold Darke. Surprisingly, it's in few hymnals; it was in only three of the 20 hymnals which I consulted. In those three, the third and most intimate stanza was omitted...most likely as a result of prudish hymnal editors and committees finding it *scandalous!*

But did you notice? "Bleak" is mentioned three times in the first two stanzas, and then is heard no more! After descending into a feeling of cold hopelessness, a calm emerges, warmth and adoration. The final verse is that of humility...how can my gifts compare to those who have riches? More important than those is my ability to love and serve Him, to give Him my mind, body, soul, *and heart* in devotion to and worship of Him.

The prophet Isaiah said in chapter 60, verses 1-3: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

Isaiah's foresight leads us to the prologue to the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the **light** of all people. The **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the **light**, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the **light**, but he came to testify to the **light**. The true **light**, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." (Emphasis mine.)

That true light is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! As Masons, we are seekers of light; that is, knowledge and truth. As Templars, we know that light (lower case "l") of knowledge and truth provides us with the Light (upper case "L") which shines brightly in the Good News of the New Testament.

This Light dispels the dark and bleak midwinters in our lives, and the darkness of ignorance to those who will listen to him, follow him, and give him their hearts. We can all say I want to follow Jesus! Reflect the light of Christ's glory, and watch the frost and cold of midwinter melt away in the warmth of the coming Son. Give thanks and praise to God for his indescribable gift!