

Bethlehem Down

Peter Warlock



1. 'When he is king we will give him the king's gifts
Myrrh for its sweetness and gold for a crown,
Beautiful robes' said the young girl to Joseph,
Fair with her first born on Bethlehem Down.
2. Bethlehem Down is full of the starlight,
Winds for the spices and stars for the gold,
Mary for sleep and for lullaby music
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.
3. When he is king they will clothe him in grave sheets,
Myrrh for embalming and wood for a crown,
He that lies now in the white arms of Mary,
Sleeping so lightly on Bethlehem Down.
4. Here He has peace and a short while for dreaming,
Close huddled oxen to keep him from cold,
Mary for love and for lullaby music,
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

"Bethlehem Down" is a choral anthem or carol written in 1927 by composer Peter Warlock (1894–1930) (Philip Arnold Heseltine) as a setting for a poem written by journalist and poet Bruce Blunt (1899–1957). Warlock wrote it to finance an "immortal carouse" on Christmas Eve 1927 for himself and Blunt, who were experiencing financial difficulty. The pair submitted the carol to the **Daily Telegraph's** annual Christmas carol contest and won. On Christmas Eve they subsequently got "properly drunk" to celebrate. It is included in **The New Oxford Book of Carols** (#112).