

## The Cherry Tree Carol

When Jo - seph was an old - man, An - old man was  
he, When he cour - ted Vir - gin Ma - ry, In the  
land of Gal - i lee, When he cour - ted Vir - gin  
Ma - ry, In the land of Gal - i lee.

1. When Joseph was an old man,  
An old man was he,  
When he courted Virgin Mary,  
In the land of Galilee,  
When he courted Virgin Mary,  
In the land of Galilee,
2. As Joseph and Mary  
Walked through an orchard green  
There were berries and cherries  
As thick as might be seen.
3. Then Mary spoke to Joseph,  
So meek and so mild,  
"Joseph, gather me some cherries  
For I am with child."
4. Then Joseph flew in anger  
In anger flew he,  
"Let the father of the baby  
Gather cherries for thee!"
5. Then up spoke baby Jesus  
Within Mary's womb,  
"Bow down, you tallest cherry tree  
That my mother might have some."
6. Then bowed down the highest cherry tree  
Til it touched Mary's hand;  
Cried she, O look thou, Joseph,  
I have cherries at command.
7. Then Joseph took Mary  
All on his right knee,  
"Pray tell me, little baby,  
When your birthday shall be?"
8. "On the sixth day of old January  
My birthday shall be,  
When the stars and the elements  
Shall bow unto me."

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This carol, Child #54, was collected in Britain in the 17th century and has been found throughout the Appalachians, as well as in the Ozarks and in Canada. The song itself is very old, reportedly sung in some form at the Feast of Corpus Christi in the early 15th century. The versions eventually collected by Francis James Child are thought to be a combination of up to three separate carols that merged through the centuries. The story is derived from the apocryphal **Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew**, which combines many earlier apocryphal Nativity traditions; however, in Pseudo-Matthew, the event takes place during the flight into Egypt, and the fruit tree is a palm tree (presumably a date palm) and not a cherry tree. In the apocryphal Gospel, Jesus has already been born and so Joseph's truculence is unrelated to any dismay over Mary's pregnancy, but has to do with an inability to reach the fruits of the palm and a concern over the family's lack of water.

This tune is from Kentucky.

It is included in **The New Oxford Book of Carols** (#128).

It was recorded by Jean Ritchie, Joan Baez on **Joan Baez, Vol. 2**, Clancy Brothers, Judy Collins, José Feliciano, Emmylou Harris, Mary Hopkin, Chad Mitchell Trio, Nowell Sing We Clear, Pentangle, Peter Paul and Mary and many others.

I learned this from the recording by Joan Baez.