

“When Christmas Comes”
Lyrics by Virna Sheard
Music by Byron hermann

For thee, my small one – trinkets and new toys,
The wine of life and all its keenest joys,
When Christmas comes.
For me, the broken playthings of the past
That in my folded hands I still hold fast,
When Christmas comes.

For thee, fair hopes of all that yet may be,
And tender dreams of sweetest mystery,
When Christmas comes.
For thee, the future in a golden haze,
For me, the memory of some bygone days,
When Christmas comes.

For thee, the things that lightly come and go,
For thee, the holly and the mistletoe,
When Christmas comes.
For me, the smiles that are akin to tears,
For me, the frost and snows of many years,
When Christmas comes.

For thee, the twinkling candles bright and gay,
For me, the purple shadows and the grey,
When Christmas comes.
For thee, the friends that greet thee at the door,
For me, the faces I shall see no more,
When Christmas comes.

But ah, for both of us the mystic star
That leadeth back to Bethlehem afar,
When Christmas comes.
For both of us the child they saw of old,
That evermore his mother’s arms enfold,
When Christmas comes.

Virna Sheard was a Canadian poet and novelist, born in 1862 in Cobourg, Canada West, the daughter of Elizabeth Butler and Eldridge Stanton, a photographer. Eldridge was a descendant of United Empire Loyalists. The family moved soon after to Toronto where she was raised. Her brother Eldridge Stanton Jr. and his wife both died at Niagara Falls in the Ice Bridge Disaster of 1912.

In 1884 she married Dr. Charles Sheard (1857-1929), a surgeon at Toronto's Chief Medical Officer, and for years she devoted most of her time and energy to domestic and social duties. In the early years of motherhood, during her late twenties, Virna began to write, sending her first poem to the famous American children's magazine, St. Nicholas. With the encouragement of the editor of the latter she became a regular contributor of poems and short stories to *The Globe*, *Saturday Night and Mail* and *Empire* as well as to prominent American magazines. Her first novel, *Trevelyan's Little Daughters* (1898), was well received. As each of her four sons began to enroll at Upper Canada College, Virna began to write for a more mature audience. Her stories and novels demonstrate an interest in reconstructed pasts and religious themes. The first of her five volumes of poetry, *The Miracle and Other Poems* (1913), was dedicated to her younger brother, the victim of a tragic accident at Niagara Falls in 1912. Virna Sheard was widowed in 1929, and died in 1943, aged 81 years. Her papers were destroyed by her family after her death, apparently because they disapproved of her literary work.

Notes from the composer

I have always found that there are many conflicting emotions around the holiday season. I wanted to find a text that reflected these emotions but also reflected the hope that the feelings around this season can offer.

The poem "When Christmas Comes" by Canadian poet Viran Sheard reflects these feelings well and also provides some dramatic possibilities for a unique choral setting. *When Christmas Comes* is a poignant poem that compares Christmas for a child versus an adult, and all the memories it brings up for the latter. Each stanza presents a different juxtaposition of these feelings with the text starting "For thee" or "For me". The final stanza brings the chorus together in a fortisissimo unison sound of hope as all recall the "mystic Bethlehem star" and the enfolding of a child in a mother's arms.

This juxtaposition is heard in the choral "dialogue" between the tenor section and the Bass/baritone sections throughout the piece. The trochaic tetrameter of the poem is also reflected in the rhythmic structure of the composition, a dance in six-eight with harmonic and rhythmic references to a time long ago.

The full version of this composition is written for TTBB choir, Brass Quintet and Organ. Tonight you will hear the version for Choir and Organ only.