

Five Reasons “Away in a Manger” is the Worst Christmas Song Ever

I love Christmas music. I believe my unblemished record of staunch Christmas musicophilia on *Rambling Ever On* [says](#) it [all](#). Yet, not all Christmas music is created equal. For every transcendent *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, there is a painfully awful *Last Christmas*. For every majestic *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, there is the horrifyingly terrible *Christmas Shoes*. So, while I love Christmas music and celebrate it every year, I don't embrace every Christmas song out there. Case in point: *Away in a Manger*. As bad as the previously mentioned songs are, they aren't nearly as terrible as the manger song, due to its insidious nature. It poses as a beautiful, sacred song. It gets played on Christian radio. It gets sung to small children. It even has the audacity to get sung in church! I reject it. Yet its soul is as black as night. I reject all of it. Here are my five main reasons.

It is biologically fraudulent

Let's get the most obvious one out of the way. Jesus was fully God and fully man. Which means He was fully baby. If Jesus had been born and then placed in a manger, and did not cry at any point, as the song states, something would have been terribly wrong with Him. Babies cry. It's a good thing they cry. Doctors make sure they cry as soon as they are born to test their lungs. Babies cry when they are hungry and thirsty. They cry when they need to be held. If Jesus did not cry then He was developmentally stunted. And we know that is not true. Which leads me to point number two.

It is emotionally manipulative

At its core, *Away in a Manger* is a lullaby. It seems to have been written for the express purpose of convincing children to go to sleep. So the wording used in the song is deliberately manipulative to that end. The thinking behind must have gone something like this – “Good little children want to be like the “little Lord Jesus”, right? Well, He didn’t cry so they shouldn’t either. And if they do cry, then they are not like Jesus at all.” That is almost unconscionable.

It is poorly written

I get really irritated with songs that change perspective. *Away in a Manger* is a big offender in this regard. It starts off third person for the first three stanzas but suddenly goes into first person on the three final and climactic stanzas. Why? Because the writer ran out of more drippy examples of insipid, idealized first-century life? Or because the writer wanted to really pour on the guilt trip for the listening children that were struggling to go to sleep like good little boys and girls? Or was it because the songwriter wanted to include some lame declaration of love to the “Lord Jesus.” I say lame, not because loving Jesus is lame, but because tacking it on at the end like that is sloppy, ham-fisted, and obsequious, not to Jesus, but to the listeners in an attempt to convince them that this is truly a good, Christian song.

And the line, “no crying He makes” is just bad poetry on every level. Did Yoda get co-writing credit on this or something?

It is patronizingly ordinary

The incarnation of Christ is one of the most miraculous and amazing things to ever happen. It is good to sing songs about it. It is good to be brought to worship thinking about it. What *Away in a Manger* does is take that magnificent event and turn it into a sickly-sweet, mushy, touchy-feely mess. Shepherds, angels, and kings worshipped this child, and the best this song can do is celebrate his sleeping, his sweet little head, and that he didn't cry? O come let us adore Him indeed!

It is theologically bankrupt

I don't expect deep theological truths from every song. One of my all-time favorite Christmas songs, *O Holy Night* is not the most theologically impressive song out there. But it is poetic and beautiful and contains enough truth to make it worthwhile. *Away in a Manger* is none of those things and is most definitely not worthwhile. Beyond the silly stuff about Jesus not crying – which contradicts the rest of the Scriptural account of His earthly life – the final stanza is a hodgepodge of pseudo-religious sounding phrases mixed with shockingly modern day spiritual sentimentality. Let's unpack it, shall we?

First, Jesus is not "looking down from the sky" and if He were why would he look down from the sky "and stay by our cradles til morning is nigh"? I guess you could argue that the writer is trying to say that Jesus is everywhere, but if that is so, why start with the idea that Jesus is looking down from the sky?

Second, the penultimate stanza has the singer asking Jesus to be near them, or us. We don't have to beg Jesus to stay near us. He has promised to be with us in his Word. Many times, actually.

Third, when you further examine that stanza, you come upon an even worse question – “love me, I pray.” Once again, not necessary as it has already been promised. And to make this even more ridiculous, this song is about Jesus as a baby – His incarnation. What more proof did this writer need of Jesus’ love than this act of complete sacrifice? “Look, I realize that you just gave up Heaven and your power, and you came to earth as a human baby, with all the awful stuff that entails, but do you think you can do something else to prove to me that you love me?”

Finally, the last stanza closes things out in spectacularly wrongheaded fashion. It starts off okay with a request for blessing for all the children that are in Jesus’ care. I can get on board with that. It ends with a request for Jesus to take us all to Heaven to live with Him there. It doesn’t work like that. Jesus doesn’t just take everyone to heaven. That’s where repentance and salvation come into play, but let’s not get hung up on the very foundation of the Gospel or anything!

This Christmas, listen to as much music as you can. It is a profitable and worthy endeavor. Yet, for the sake of your soul, and the souls of those around you, avoid garbage songs like *Away in a Manger*. While there are probably more aesthetically offensive Christmas songs out there – I’m looking at you *Christmas Shoes* – there is no song that is as deviously evil as *Away in a Manger*. It cloaks itself in religious language and holy imagery, in a vain attempt to hide the utter darkness of it’s twisted and corrupt heart. Flee from it my friends. Flee for your lives.