

Lullay, my child, and wepe no more

London, British Library, Add. MS 5666, fol. 2v (music survives for the burden only). Music for the strophes by Leah Stuttard.

A fifteenth-century lullaby carol in a northern English dialect. The singer overhears Mary rocking the cradle, and then the Christ child himself speaks: he cannot sleep, he is cold, and he already knows what lies ahead of him. It is tender and dark at the same time, which is why it sits so well beside the Franciscan crib. The burden is sung at the start and again at the end. On the right is the spelling we sing; 'sauy' is saw, 'crache' is crib, 'rode' is cross, 'thirll' is pierce.

English translation

Middle English (as sung)

Burden

'Lullay, my child, and weep no more;
sleep and be still now;
the King of Bliss is your Father,
and thus it is his will.'

*'Lullay, my child, and wepe no more;
Sclepe and be now styll;
The Kyng of Blis thi Fader he es,
And thus it es his wyll.'*

Strophe 1

The other night I saw a sight:
a maiden keeping watch over a cradle,
and all the while she sang, and said between,
'Lullay, my child, and sleep.'

*This ender nithgt I sau y ha sithgt,
Ha may ha credill kepe,
Hande euer schuy sang hande sayde in mang,
'Lullay, my child, ande slepe.'*

Strophe 2

'I cannot sleep; I can only weep;
I am so woebegone;
I would sleep, but I am cold,
and I have no clothes at all.'

*'I may nocht slepe; I may bot wepe;
I ham so wo begony;
Slepe I wolde, bot me hes colde,
Hande clothes hauf I nony.'*

Strophe 3

The child was sweet, and sorely he wept,
and it seemed to me he kept saying,
'Mother dear, what am I doing here?
Why am I laid in a manger?'

*The chylde was swet, hande sor he wepe,
Hande euer me thoht he sayde,
'Moder dere, wat do y I here?
In crache wy ham I layde?'*

Strophe 4

'Adam's guilt, which has ruined mankind,
that sin grieves me full sore;
Man, for your sake I shall be here
thirty years and more.'

*'Adam gilt that man has spilde,
That syn rues me fole sor;
Man, for the here sal I be
Thirty yere and mor.'*

Strophe 5

'Sorrows to endure, and I shall die,
and I shall hang upon the cross;
my wounds shall be wet, the world's ills made good,
and I shall give my flesh to bleed.'

*'Dolles to dreye, ande I sale dye,
Ande hyng I sale on the rode;
My woundys to wete, my bals to bethe,
Ande gif my fleches to blode.'*

Strophe 6

'A spear so sharp shall pierce my heart
for the deed that man has done;
Father of Bliss, why have you
forsaken me, your son?'

*'A spere so charpe sale thirll my hert
For the dede that man has done;
Fadere of Blys, war tu thou has
Forsakin me, thi sone?'*

The burden is sung again, in four parts, after the last strophe.