



I am the rose of Sharon¹, and the lily of the valleys. (Song 2:1)

Lo, how a Rose e'er Blooming

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung!
of Jesse's lineage coming,
as those of old have sung.
It came, a floweret bright,
amid the cold of winter,
when half spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
the Rose I have in mind;
with Mary we behold it,
the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
she bore to us a Savior,
when half spent was the night.

¹ Rose of Sharon is a common name that applies to several different species of flowering plants that are highly valued throughout the world. The name's colloquial application has been used as an example of the lack of precision of common names, which potentially causes confusion. "Rose of Sharon" has also become a frequently used catch phrase in lyrics and verse.

Chavatzet HaSharon (Hebrew *השרון הבצלת*) is an onion-like flower bulb. (Hebrew *הבצלת* *hăḇaṣṣelaṭ*) is a flower of uncertain identity translated as the rose of Sharon in English language translations of the Bible. Etymologists have inconclusively linked the biblical *הבצלת* to the words *בצל* *beṣel*, meaning 'bulb', and *חמץ* *hāmaṣ*, which is understood as meaning either 'pungent' or 'splendid'. The name "rose of Sharon" first appears in English in 1611 in the King James Version of the Bible.

The most accepted interpretation for the Biblical reference is *Pancretium maritimum*, which blooms in the late summer just above the high-tide mark. The Hebrew name for this flower is *החוף הבצלת* or *הבצלת* (coastal *hăḇaṣṣelaṭ*). It is commonly assumed by most people in Israel that, the Sharon Plain being on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the Biblical passage refers to this flower.

The shepherds heard the story
proclaimed by angels bright,
how Christ, the Lord of glory
was born on earth this night.
To Bethlehem they sped
and in the manger they found him,
as angel heralds said.

This Flower, whose fragrance tender
with sweetness fills the air,
dispels with glorious splendor
the darkness everywhere;
true man, yet very God,
from sin and death he saves us,
and lightens every load.

This quaint old Christmas Carol is of German origin - the first two stanzas from the 15th century, and the last by Friedrich Layritz in 1854. The musical score is titled, Es ist ein Ros. The words describe the beauty of the Promise of Christ and of the unfolding beauty of that great event.

"Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung! of Jesse's lineage coming, as those of old have sung. It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night." The ancients had a far keener sense of beauty than does the modern man, so obsessed is he with his gadgets and gadgets. The ancients could see the beauty of the higher Creation illustrated in the natural beauty of the world around. The Rose is, in its budding state, a sure promise of an unfolding beauty. It sprang up in hope of all the natural prerequisites for its full growth and development. It seemed so frail as a tiny sprig, but with absolute determination, one detects a tiny bud has formed. By and by, that bud grows and begins to unfold revealing a majestic and heavenly beauty beyond man's ability to duplicate. Not only is the appearance lovely, but it emits a wonderful fragrance that is carried to all around by the breezes of the morning. That Rosebud was the beginning of the promise made by God through the prophet Isaiah: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Jesus Christ is our Rose of unfolding beauty. The more pages of His Word we digest, the greater the number of petals that are spread out upon which we feast our eyes. The effects of His Word in our hearts is as a magnificent fragrance that sweetens the atmosphere that surrounds His people. In the cold of winter, the longest day of the year, Jesus was born. It was also the longest dark night of the spirit when, in the fullness of time, Christ came to lift our unbecoming yokes and warm our hearts. He came to make us a part of His New Creation in the bleak winter night of our lives. Just as the Creation of the worlds began in darkness, "and the evening and the morning were the first day," so does the spiritual Creation of Christ begin for us in our darkness and hopeless despair. That darkness will end in the brilliance of eternal day for all who have believed.

"Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind; with Mary we behold it, the Virgin Mother kind. To show God's love aright, she bore to us a Savior, when half spent was the night." Mary became that pure and delightful Rose branch from which a single Rose was produced. She was the branch, but God was the Gardener. This young virgin

lady bore the shame and abuse of an early pregnancy in obedience to her Lord. She endured three days journey by donkey in her late term bearing the Lord Jesus in her blessed womb. Bedding down in a stable - for like today, there was no room elsewhere for the Lord Jesus Christ - Mary experienced the pains of birth on that cold winter night. Though the skies are pristine and filled with bright stars in that land, the air can be bitterly cold and piercing. Mary was both called and chosen to bear her child. She never demurred, but was perfectly obedient to God in her child-like innocence.

"The shepherds heard the story proclaimed by angels bright, how Christ, the Lord of glory was born on earth this night. To Bethlehem they sped and in the manger they found him, as angel heralds said." Here we sing of the sacred events associated with that first Christmas morning while it was yet dark. Here is only a portion of the wonderful story related by St. Luke: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." (Luke 2:8-18)

The shepherds provide an excellent example of how we should respond at the wonderful news of Jesus. God seems to always choose those special people who are at their labors, not idling in some luxurious estate. So He chose these poor shepherds. These shepherds were suddenly startled by a magnificent vision in the heavens. A huge and great angel filled the sky resplendent with glorious beams of light. The shepherds were afraid. Were you afraid when you first realized who you were, and who Jesus is? But God always brings comfort and solace. "Fear not!" was the salutation of the angel. Good news is always a welcome blessing. Jesus did not become the Savior - He was born our Savior. In the Providence of God, all that He wills shall come to pass and is as good as done! The angel gave a sign to the shepherds - where to find Jesus, and what would be his appearance. This was the greatest news since the morning of Creation when the stars sang together. The hosts of heaven had also awaited this event with bated breath. They could contain their exhilaration no longer! " And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

What would you have done after hearing this most blessed news, Reader? "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." When God first revealed to your heart your lostness and depravity, and that there was a Savior for you, what did you do? Did you immediately flee to His Throne of Mercy and petition for pardon? Did you find Christ? And what did you afterwards? What did the shepherds do? "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this

child." If you just on a fifty million dollar lottery, would you remain silent to all around? A lottery is nothing compared to the benefits and riches of Christ. You cannot keep silent about finding Jesus no more than could the lepers that Jesus healed, or Jairus and family after their little girl was restored to life. We must speak out of a full heart, else it will burst for joy! The Christian cannot conceal Christ secretly in his heart.

"This Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air, dispels with glorious splendor the darkness everywhere; true man, yet very God, from sin and death he saves us, and lightens every load." A beautiful rose cannot be hidden. Its blood red beauty serves as a flag of its presence. Even its fragrance draws the honey bees from miles around. The beauty and sweetness of a rose is such a gentle and tender beauty. It never flaunts itself for it does not need to. All of the rose is its natural adornment. If there is even a slight hint of light, the red rose reflects it. Jesus is the Light of the World, and darkness cannot exist in the presence of even a single candle - much less the Sun of Righteousness and Daystar. Jesus saves us from our sentence of death, and He lifts our burdens from our backs and gives us a new yoke which supports, rather than weighs down, our walk in life with Him. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt 11:28-30) Have you heard the news? Have you found Jesus this Christmas?