

= Matthew , Mark , Luke and John =

" Matthew , Mark , Luke and John " , also known as the " Black Paternoster " , is an English language prayer and nursery rhyme traditionally said by children as they go to bed . It has a Roud Folk Song Index number of 1704 . It may have origins in ancient Babylonian prayers and was being used in a Christian version in late Medieval Germany . The earliest extant version in English can be traced to the mid @-@ sixteenth century . It was mentioned by English Protestant writers as a " popish " or magical charm . It is related to other prayers , including a " Green " and " White Paternoster " , which can be traced to late Medieval England and with which it is often confused . It has been the inspiration for a number of literary works by figures including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and musical works by figures such as Gustav Holst . It has been the subject of alternative versions and satires .

= = Lyrics = =

The most common modern version of the verse is as follows :

Matthew , Mark , Luke and John ,  
Bless the bed that I lie on .  
Four corners to my bed ,  
Four angels round my head ;  
One to watch and one to pray  
And two to bear my soul away .

The Roud Folk Song Index , which catalogues folk songs and their variations by number , classifies the song as 1704 .

= = Origins = =

The verse may be one of few English nursery rhymes to have ancient origins . The Babylonian prayer " Shamash before me , behind me Sin , Nergal at my right , Ninib at my left " , is echoed by the medieval Jewish prayer : " In the name of the Lord , the God of Israel , may Michael be at my right hand ; Gabriel at my left ; Uriel before me ; Raphael behind me and the Shekhinah of God be above my head " which is used as a prayer before sleep . A Christian version has been found for Germany at the end of the Medieval period . However , the first known record of the lyrics in English is from Thomas Ady 's witchcraft treatise *A Candle in the Dark* , or , a treatise concerning the nature of witches and witchcraft ( 1656 ) , which tells of a woman in Essex who claimed to have lived in the reign of Mary I ( r . 1553 @-@ 8 ) and who was alive in his time and blessed herself every night with the " popish charm " :

Matthew , Mark , Luke and John ,  
The Bed be blest that I lye on .

George Sinclair , writing of Scotland in his *Satan 's Invisible World Discovered* in 1685 , repeated Ady 's story and told of a witch who used a " Black Paternoster " , at night , which seems very similar to Ady 's rhyme :

Four newks in this house , for haly Angels ,  
A post in the midst , that 's Christ Jesus ,  
Lucas , Marcus , Matthew , Joannes ,  
God be into this house , and all that belangs us .  
A year later it was quoted again by John Aubrey , but in the form :  
Matthew , Mark , Luke , and John ,  
Bless the bed that I lye on .

And blessed Guardian @-@ Angel keep  
Me safe from danger whilst I sleep .

A version similar to that quoted at the beginning of this article was first recorded by Sabine Baring @-@ Gould in 1891 , and it survived as a popular children 's prayer in England into the twentieth

century .

= = " White Paternoster " = =

Robert Grosseteste ( c . 1175 ? 1253 ) , Bishop of Lincoln , condemned the use of a " Green Paternoster " by old women in a treatise on blasphemy , which contained reference to " Green Pater Noster , Peter 's dear sister " . In Chaucer 's " Miller 's Tale " ( c . 1387 ) he refers to a prayer known as the " White Paternoster " , elements of which , particularly the blessing of four parts of a house , can be seen in the later " Black Paternoster " :

Therwith the nyght @-@ spel seyde he anon @-@ rightes

On four halves of the hous aboute

And on the thresshold of the dore withoute :

'Jesus Crist and Seint Benedight ,

Bless this hous from every wickked wight ,

For the nyghts nerye the white pater @-@ noster !

Where wentestow , Seinte Petres suster ? '

The reference to St. Peter 's sister may be a substitution for St. Peter 's daughter , St. Petronilla , known in England as St. Parnell . It has been suggested that the differing colours associated with these verses may have been determined by the colour of prayer beads , with different coloured beads used to prompt the recitation of aves and paternosters .

After the Reformation this " White Paternoster " was among a number of prayers and devotions that were converted into magical rhymes , becoming widely known charms . Lancashire minister John White ( 1570 ? 1615 ) in his The Way to the True Church ( 1608 ) recorded among many " superstitions " of the inhabitants of Lancashire , a " White Paternoster " :

White Pater @-@ noster , St Peter ? s brother ,

What hast i ? th 't ? one hand ? White booke leaves .

What hast i ? th 't ? other hand ? heaven yate keys .

Open heaven Yates , and steike shut hells Yates :

And let every chrisome child creep to its own mother .

White Pater @-@ noster , Amen .

Sinclair in 1685 contrasted the " Black Paternoster " to be used at night with a " White Paternoster " to be used in the day .

White paternoster ,

God was my Foster .

He fostered me Under the Book of Palm @-@ Tree ,

St Michael was my Dame ,

He was born at Bethelem .

He was made of flesh and blood .

God send me my right food ;

My right food , and dyne two ,

That I may to yon Kirk go

To read upon yon sweet Book ,

Which the mighty God of heaven shoop .

Open , open Heaven 's Yaits ,

Steik , Steik , Hell 's Yaits .

All the saints be better ,

That hear the white prayer Pater Noster .

Anthropologist Margaret Murray suggested in her controversial 1933 book The God of the Witches that the names of the two companion verses could be interpreted as " a confused version of a Christian prayer or hymn " :

= = Literary and musical references = =

The " White Paternoster " was used by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ( 1807 ? 82 ) as a mockery of the mass by Lucifer , described as the " Black Paternoster " in his narrative poem The Golden Legend ( 1851 ) . It was also the title of a short story by Theodore Francis Powys ( 1875 ? 1953 ) published in 1930 . A four @-@ part choir setting of the Black Paternoster text was produced by Gustav Holst ( 1874 ? 1934 ) in early 20th @-@ Century Britain , while contemporary countryman Henry Walford Davies ( 1869 ? 1941 ) composed an equivalent setting of the White Paternoster .

= = Satires = =

The rhyme has often been the source of satire . One of the most common was recorded in Scotland in the 1840s as a hobby horse game among boys , with the lyrics :

Matthew , Mark , Luke and John ,  
Hold the horse till I get on ;  
When I got on I could not ride ,  
I fell off and broke my side .

A version from the United States recorded in 1900 began :

Matthew , Mark , Luke and John ,  
Saddle the horse till I get on ...