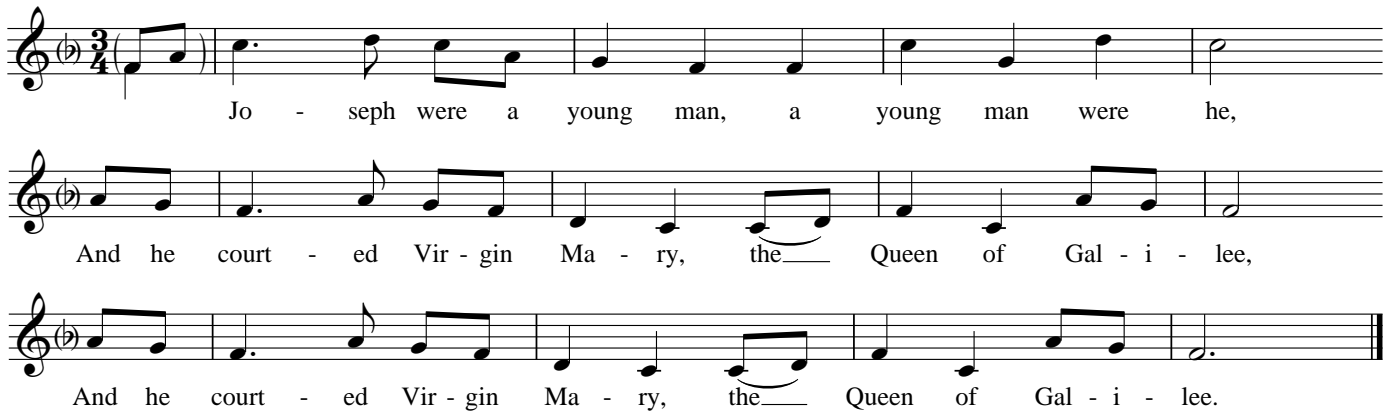


The Cherry Tree Carol #2

Informant/Performer:
Maud Long
Hot Springs, NC, 1946

Source:
Library of Congress AFS 7922 A&B
Collected by Artus M. Moser, 1946



Transcribed by Katalin Komlos

2. Mary and Joseph were a-walking one day,
"Here is apples and cherries a-plenty to behold,
Here is apples and cherries a-plenty to behold."
3. Mary spoke to Joseph so meek and so mild,
"Joseph, gather me some cherries for I am with child,
Joseph, gather me some cherries for I am with child."
4. Joseph flew in anger, in anger he flew,
Saying, "Let the father of your baby gather cherries for you,"
Saying, "Let the father of your baby gather cherries for you."
5. The Lord spoke down from Heaven, these words he did say,
"Bow you low down, you cherry tree, while Mary gathers some,
Bow you low down, you cherry tree, while Mary gathers some."
6. The cherry tree bowed down, it was low on the ground
And Mary gathered cherries while Joseph stood around,
And Mary gathered cherries while Joseph stood around.
7. Then Joseph took Mary all on his right knee,
"Pray tell me, little baby, when your birthday shall be,
Pray tell me, little baby, when your birthday shall be."
8. "On the fifth day of January my birthday shall be
When the stars and the elements shall tremble with fear,
When the stars and the elements shall tremble with fear."
9. Then Joseph took Mary all on his left knee,
Saying, "Lord, have mercy upon me, for what have I done?"
Saying, "Lord, have mercy upon me, for what have I done?"

Background Information

The source of "The Cherry-Tree Carol" is found in the Pseudo-Matthew's gospel, chapter xx, which is briefly summarized by Professor Child: "On the third day of the flight into Egypt, Mary, feeling the heat to be oppressive, tells Joseph that she will rest for a while under the palm tree. Joseph helps her light from her beast, and Mary, looking up from under the tree, and seeing it full of fruit, asks for some. Joseph somewhat testily expresses his surprise that she should think of such a thing, considering the height of the tree; he is much more concerned to get a supply of water. Then Jesus, sitting on his mother's lap, bids the palm to bow down and refresh his mother with its fruit. The palm instantly bends its top to Mary's feet."

The story as we have it in the carol is altered considerably. The palm becomes a cherry-tree; Joseph's reply ill-humoredly insinuates that Mary has been unfaithful; and the Lord, rather than Jesus, speaks and orders the tree to bow down. In other American versions, however, the Child miraculously speaks from Mary's womb to order the miracle. Here He speaks only in answer to the question about His birth date. It is of interest that the "fifth day of January" was, according to "Old Style" reckoning, the date of Christmas Day between the years 1752 and 1799. In 1751, when a change in the calendar had become necessary, eleven days were dropped out between September 2nd and 14th, thus making January 5th the date of Old Christmas Day. In 1800, another day was dropped and in 1900 still another, so that Old Christmas Day now falls on January 7th.

[see also notes to Cherry Tree Carol #1]

-- from the liner notes of *Anglo-American Songs and Ballads* (AAFS L14)