

Commissioned by First United Church of Christ, Northfield, Minn.  
Christopher Brunelle, Director of Music

# *Birth of Christ*

for SATB Choir and Handbells (2012)

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DAVID WOLFF

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Performance Time: ca. 3:15



## *BIRTH OF CHRIST*

from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Das Marien-Leben (Life of the Virgin Mary)*, translated by Stephen Spender

*Were you not simple, how could that have happened  
to you, which now illumines all our night?  
God, who raged over nations in his might,  
in you is mild, and to the world descends.*

*Is he less great than you'd imagined?*

*What is greatness? Cutting through all measures  
which he crosses, goes his line of fate.  
Straighter his path even than are stars.  
Behold, the kings who have come here are great,*

*and, for you, they drag treasures out to set*

*upon your lap: the greatest, as they hold.  
Perhaps you are astonished at so much.  
Then look down into your shawl's fold,  
see how already he has surpassed each.*

*All such amber shipped from far off, such*

*gold ornaments and aromatic spices  
spreading a blurred dazedness in the mind:  
these were all but of a rapid shortness  
and maybe regretted in the end.*

*But (as you will see): He brings joy.*

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## Performance Notes

1. Accidentals carry through the measure, applying only to the register and part they appear in.

2. Metronome markings are only approximations.

3. Passages notated should be sung *divisi* within a section.

4. Passages notated should be balanced across sections accordingly.

# Birth of Christ

**RAINER MARIA RILKE**  
Trans. by Stephen Spender

**DAVID WOLFF**

Serenely ♩ = 92-96

Soprano *solo p*  
Were you \_\_\_\_\_ not

Alto *solo p*  
Were you not

Tenor

Bass

Handbells *p*

7

S *poco rall.*  
sim - ple, \_\_\_\_\_ how could that have hap - pened \_\_\_\_\_

A  
sim - ple, \_\_\_\_\_ how could that have hap - pened \_\_\_\_\_

T

B

*poco rall.*

12 *poco ten.* **A Tempo** 15

S — to you, —

A — to you, — ... *tutti p* which now il - lu —

T — — — — — *p* which now il - lu —

B — — — — —

**A Tempo** 15

LV

12

17 *tutti mp* *poco rall.* *poco*

S which now il - lu - mines all our — night? *poco*

A — — — — — mines all our — night? *poco*

T — — — — — mines all — night? *poco*

B which now il - lu - mines all our — night? *poco*

*mp* *poco rall.* *p* *poco*

17

S *sfp* God, \_\_\_\_\_ *sfp* God, who

A *sfp* God, \_\_\_\_\_ who raged o'er na-tions, raged o'er na-tions, raged o'er na-tions,

T *sfp* God, \_\_\_\_\_ who raged o'er na-tions, raged o'er na-tions, raged o'er na-tions,

B *sfp* God, \_\_\_\_\_ who raged o'er na-tions, raged o'er na-tions, raged o'er na-tions,

21 Agitated ♩ = 69 *stringendo* ----- (♩ ≈ 92) -----

*p* *cresc.* ----- *mp*

21

--- ♩ = 116 *rall.* ----- (♩ ≈ 76) *poco rall.* *f*

S raged o'er na-tions, God, who raged o'er na-tions, na-tions in his

A God who raged o'er, raged o'er na-tions, na-tions, na-tions in his

T God, who raged o'er, raged o'er na-tions, na-tions, na-tions in his

B God, who raged o'er, raged o'er na-tions, na-tions, na-tions in his

--- ♩ = 116 *rall.* ----- (♩ ≈ 76) *poco rall.* *mf* ----- *f*

24

26 **Calmer** ♩ = 76

S might, \_\_\_\_\_ in you is mild, *p sub.*

A might, \_\_\_\_\_ in you \_\_\_\_\_ is mild, *p sub.*

T might, \_\_\_\_\_ in you \_\_\_\_\_ is mild, *molto pp pp*

B might, \_\_\_\_\_ in you \_\_\_\_\_ is mild, *molto pp pp*

26 **Calmer** ♩ = 76

*mp p*

26

30 **Più mosso** ♩ = 116

S and to the world, and to the world de - scends. *p*

A and to the world, and to the world de - scends. *p*

T and to the world, and to the world *p*

B and to the world, and to the world de - scends. *p*

30 **Più mosso** ♩ = 116

*p mf p*

30

36

S

A

T

B

*mp*

*mp* Is

Is

♩ = 76

36

40

S

A

T

B

*mp*

What is

*mp*

What is

he less great than you im - ag - ined?

he less great than you im - ag - ined?

40

40

43

S *mf*  
great - ness? \_\_\_\_\_ Cut - ting through all meas - ures which he

A *mf*  
great - ness? \_\_\_\_\_ Cut - ting through all meas - ures

T *mf*  
Cut - ting through all

B *mf*  
Cut - ting through

*mf*

43

45

S  
cross - es, all meas - ures which he cross - es, \_\_\_\_\_

A  
which he cross - es, \_\_\_\_\_ through all meas - ures

T  
meas - ures which he cross - es, which he cross - es, \_\_\_\_\_

B  
all meas - ures which he cross - es, \_\_\_\_\_ meas - ures

45



49 Poco più mosso ♩ = 84

47

S goes his line of fate. Straight-er his path,

A goes his line of fate. Straight-er his path,

T goes his line of fate. Straight-er his path,

B goes his line of fate. Straight-er his path,

49 Poco più mosso ♩ = 84

50

S straight-er his path e - ven than are stars. Be -

A straight-er his path e - ven than are stars. Be -

T straight-er his path e - ven than are stars. Be -

B straight-er his path e - ven than are stars. Be -