

Glory be to the Word

Šūbhō Lhaw Qolo

Saint Ephrem (306–373)

Traditional Syriac Hymn,
arr. Roxanna Panufnik

Andante ♩ = 72

Soprano *mf* Glo - ry to that

Alto *mf* Glo - ry to that

Tenor *mf* Glo - ry to that

Bass *mf* Glo - ry to that

Piano/Organ *mf* bell-like

*)

4

voice _____ Who be - came a bo - dy, And to the Word of the

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*) If playing this on organ, you won't need spreads as pedal can take bottom note,
but you're welcome to keep them in.

Glory be to the Word *Šūbhō Lhaw Qolo*

Glory to that Voice Who became a body,
and to the Word of the High One, Who then became flesh.
Ears could even hear Him, eyes beheld Him,
hands could even touch Him, the mouth received Him.

Limbs and earthly senses, give thanks to the One
Who came and revived what had died within us all.
Mary was bearing a speechless infant,
though in Him all languages were on His little tongue.

Joseph was holding Him, yet hidden in that Babe was
an ancient nature older than everything.
He was lying down as a child, yet hidden in Him was
a treasure of wisdom that is relevant to all.

Lying down, He was suckled by the milk of Mary,
though by His goodness all creatures were nourished as well.
He is the beating heart and the living breath,
by His life the dead were nourished, so they were revived.

Without a breath of air no one can survive,
without the might of the Son no one can thrive.
Without the First-born no one can come into existence,
Only Jesus can bring us into the sacred light.

Words by Saint Ephrem (306–373),
translation by Roxanna Panufnik

In searching for a suitable fundraising carol with Middle Eastern links (for charity Three Peas, which supports refugees stranded on Greek Islands), this beautiful Syriac Maronite nativity hymn *Šūbhō Lhaw Qolo*, was brought to my attention by Father Antoine Al Tahan. It's much loved and comes in several different versions – my favourite is Fr Antoine's own rendition and that sung by the wonderful Fairuz.

The mysteriousness of the third verse inspired me to take a step further than the quarter-tone sung in one arrangement, flattening the sixth but then naturalizing it in the next bar. As if to emphasize the 'ancient wisdom', the voices take it in turn to sing in the original ancient Syriac words.

I am hugely grateful to Fr Antoine for all the research help and guidance during the creative process. Also to choir directors Peter Broadbent and Angela Chillingworth for trying parts out before I finalized it.

Roxanna Panufnik
October 2024