

Christina Georgina Rossetti

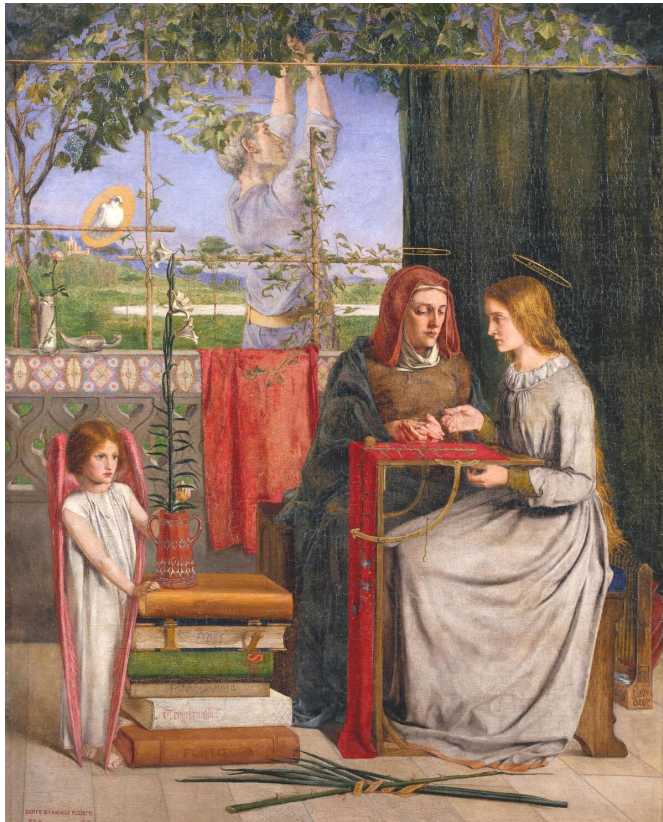
December 5, 1830-December 29, 1894

Christina's Life and Work

- Parents: Gabriele and Frances Polidori Rossetti
- Youngest of four Rossetti children
 - Maria Francesca (1827-1876), a nun
 - Dante Gabriel (1828-1882), an artist (of the portrait above)
 - William Michael (1829-1819), a writer and critic
- Her poems were widely published in journals and collected in volumes in her lifetime.
- Recurring themes and subjects
 - The soul's longing for and union with God
 - The theological virtues: faith, hope, and love
 - Biblical allusions to all of Scripture
 - Liturgical feasts and fasts; walking with the saints
- Major publications
 - *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862)
 - *Called to Be Saints* (1881), a commentary on the feasts of the church
 - *The Face of the Deep* (1893), a devotional commentary on Revelation

The Three Advents of Jesus Christ

1. *Adventus redemptionis*: Christ's coming in the incarnation to redeem humanity
2. *Adventus sanctificationis*: Christ's coming in the sacraments, the Word, and the Holy Spirit
3. *Adventus glorificamus*: Christ's second coming in glory



Girlhood of Mary Virgin

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1849

Oil on canvas

Christina (age 18) and her mother Frances modeled. Christina’s dark hair color was changed to red for an allusion to Mary’s filling by the Holy Spirit.

Book Titles

Platonic Virtues:

Fortitudo [fortitude or courage]

Temperantia [temperance or self-control]

Prudentia [prudence or wisdom]

Theological Virtues:

Spes [hope]

Fides [faith]

Caritas [charity or love]



Detail from *Ecce Ancilla Domini*

[Behold the Handmaiden of the Lord]

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1850

Oil on canvas

Christina (age 19) and her brother William modeled.

Note the completed embroidery from the first painting in the right of the frame.

This work made waves in the art culture of the day because of Mary’s informal, undressed state.



Detail from *The Light of the World*

William Holman Hunt, 1853-1854

Oil on canvas

Christina Rossetti modeled for Christ's skintone, eyebrows, eyelashes, and "solemn expression," along with a dozen or so male sitters. With the Virgin Mary portraits, these paintings show a Christ who has his mother's eyes.



The Three Virtues Window

Edward Burne-Jones, 1870-1871

Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford

Stained glass

Spes [hope]

Caritas [charity or love]

Fides [faith]

Note *Fides* portrayed as one of the wise virgins with her lamp full of oil.

“This Advent Moon” (1858)

This Advent moon shines cold and clear,
These Advent nights are long;
Our lamps have burned year after year
And still their flame is strong.
‘Watchman, what of the night?’ we cry,
Heart-sick with hope deferred:
‘No speaking signs are in the sky,
Is still the watchman’s word.

The Porter watches at the gate,
The servants watch within;
The watch is long betimes and late,
The prize is slow to win.
‘Watchman, what of the night?’ But still
His answer sounds the same:
‘No daybreak tops the utmost hill,
Nor pale our lamps of flame.’

One to another hear them speak
The patient virgins wise:
‘Surely He is not far to seek’—
‘All night we watch and rise.’
‘The days are evil looking back,
The coming days are dim;
Yet count we not His promise slack,
But watch and wait for Him.’

One with another, soul with soul,
They kindle fire from fire:
‘Friends watch us who have touched the goal.’
‘They urge us, come up higher.’
‘With them shall rest our waysore feet,
With them is built our home,
With Christ.’—‘They sweet, but He most sweet,
Sweeter than honeycomb.’

There no more parting, no more pain,
The distant ones brought near,
The lost so long are found again,
Long lost but longer dear:
Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard,
Nor heart conceived that rest,
With them our good things long deferred,
With Jesus Christ our Best.

We weep because the night is long,
We laugh for day shall rise,
We sing a slow contented song
And knock at Paradise.
Weeping we hold Him fast Who wept
For us, we hold Him fast;
And will not let Him go except
He bless us first or last.

Weeping we hold Him fast to-night;
We will not let Him go
Till daybreak smite our wearied sight
And summer smite the snow:
Then figs shall bud, and dove with dove
Shall coo the livelong day;
Then He shall say, ‘Arise, My love,
My fair one, come away.’

“Love Came Down at Christmas” (1885)

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love shall be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and to all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

For Further Reading: Anglican Women Writing on Advent Themes

- Madeleine L’Engle, “After Annunciation” and “O Simplicitas”
- Claire Gilbert, *I, Julian*
- Gail Godwin, *Evensong*
- Elizabeth Goudge, *A City of Bells*
- Fleming Rutledge, *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ*
- Tish Harrison Warren, *Advent: The Season of Hope*
- Jane Williams, *The Art of Advent: A Painting a Day from Advent to Epiphany*

A Collect for the Commemoration of Christina Rossetti (April 27)

O God, whom heaven cannot hold, you inspired Christina Rossetti to express the mystery of the Incarnation through her poems: Help us to follow her example in giving our hearts to Christ, who is love; and who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.