

Joy Not to Be Denied by Frederick Sneesby

During the month of December, through the days leading up to Christmas, my brothers and sisters and I share Christmas music (or sometimes Winter, December, or Solstice music) each day. We take a few days each (there are seven of us!) and we send a text out with links to music we want the others to hear that day. Over the years we have certainly sent the classics and favorites, returning to songs and artists that perennially speak to the season, but now and then a new work or a new artist is found and passed around, and so the Christmas repertoire grows each year. I have at least five different playlists on Spotify for Christmas.

My turn has not come up yet, but I have my selections already, and one of them is a song that is not over-played but familiar, *When a Child Is Born*. Like other carols, there are many versions and as many singers who have put their touch on the song. The song expresses what many Christmas carols convey, that is, the birth of Jesus as a turning point in human history and in the understanding of human nature. Phrases such as the following are sprinkled throughout the song:

*A ray of hope flickers in the sky ...
A tiny star lights up way up high ...
A silent wish sails the seven seas ...
The winds of change whisper in the trees ...
the walls of doubt crumble, tossed and torn ...
All across the land, dawns a brand-new morn ...
For a spell or two, no-one seems forlorn ...
This comes to pass when a child is born*

Easy melody; meaningful lyrics; thoughtful reflection on the Christmas event.

I found an interpretation of *When a Child Is Born* by Sinéad O'Connor and Danny O'Reilly (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0GxEvNIHZg>). It's a wonderful rendition. I did not know who Danny O'Reilly is but found out he is the front man for a Dublin-based rock group, The Coronas, and the son of Mary Black, an Irish singer with whom I am familiar. I am familiar with Sinéad O'Connor, as most people are, who recently passed away. She skyrocketed to fame and worldwide recognition in the 1980's, had a rich career with many hits (and several failures) and numerous collaborations with other artists.

In this same period of time, Sinéad O'Connor was also embroiled in controversy. Moreover, she grappled with demons, from her troubled childhood to her mental health struggles and addictions. From a distance she seems to have had a tortured life, or at least a very troubled and not very happy one.

That is what makes her *When a Child Is Born* so special for me. Despite so many bad experiences, so much to be angry or saddened about, so many times of being pushed down, she recorded a song of hope that is an authentic invitation to joy coming from someone who had been seasoned with sorrow. For me, that is uplifting.

Every Advent season, in the weeks before Christmas, most churches dedicate a Sunday to joy. They have done it in times of war, during famines, depressions, and even plagues. Being joyful is different from being happy. Joy is a confidence in the power of goodness, an optimism rooted in having passed through hard experiences, and a perspective that views events from eternity. It is a willingness to look out for others when it may be more advisable to be selfish. It is a determination to work for a better future even against difficult odds.

We can use some joy these days, so thank you to Sinéad O'Connor and everyone who will not let their joy be denied.