

Don oíche úd i mBeithil

Phonetic Guide:

Note: ch - as in 'loch,' gh - guttural sound toward the back of the mouth; In this piece, each letter S is pronounced as in 'simple' or 'snake.' As a general rule, emphasis is on the first syllable of a word in Irish.

Don oíche úd i mBeithil, beidh tagairt faoi ghréin go brách,
Dun eecheh ood ih Mehil, bay tagert fwee ghraín go brawch,

Don oíche úd i mBeithil, go dtáinig an briathar slán;
Dun eecheh ood ih Mehil, goe dawnig an breeher slawn;

Tá gríosghrúa ar spéartha, is an talamh faoi chlúdach bán;
Taw greesghrooah air spare-ha, is an taluv fwee chlooduch bawn;

Féach Íosagán sa gliabhán, is an Mhaighdean á dhiúl le grá.
Fay-uch Eesuhgawn suh glee-uh-wawn, is an why-jin aw yool leh graw.

Literal Translation preserving word order:

For the night that in Bethlehem, will be reference under sun forever,
For the night that in Bethlehem, came the word safe;
Is a glowing cheek on skies, and the land under covering white,
See Jesus in the cradle, and the Virgin him nursing with love.

Nicer Translation:

On that night in Bethlehem, there will be reference under the sun forever;
On that night in Bethlehem, the word arrived safe;
A glow is upon the skies, and the earth under a white blanket;
Look upon Jesus in the cradle, and the Virgin nursing him with love.

A few notes on the history of 'Don Oíche Úd i mBeithil' :

The lyrics were composed by Aodh Mac Aingil Mac Cathmhaoil (1571-1626). He was an Irish Franciscan theologian born in Down, educated in Ulster and on the Isle of Man. He tutored sons of the famous Hugh O'Neill, second earl of Tyrone, and was sent to Spain, specifically the Spanish court, in order to solicit aid for the native Irish cause in Ulster. He stayed in Salamanca at the university and joined the Franciscan order. Like other Irishmen abroad, he worked to preserve Irish manuscripts which were under threat due to the ongoing conquest of Ireland, including at Louvain, a site famous for its manuscript work at the time. There he was called 'Mac Aingil,' which means 'son of an angel.' He helped found the Irish college at St. Anthony's in Louvain. Although he was named Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, he did not arrive home in time to assume responsibilities, as he died in Rome before his return. He is buried at the Church of St. Isidore.

The origin of the melody is somewhat controversial. The poet, playwright and academic Seán Óg Ó Tuama included 'Don Oíche Úd i mBeithil' in one of his songbooks during the 1950s. He claimed the melody was traditional, but others assert that Ó Tuama composed the melody himself.