

## Children Go Where I Send Thee

The Negro Spiritual “Children Go Where I Send Thee” is a hybrid of related songs from various cultures. It has a deep and varied history and comes in several variations. In its current format, the tune was discovered and popularized by Jean Ritchie. The Mayflower Community Chorus’ choral arrangement is by Ruth Schram.

The original song consists of 12 verses, but the Schram arrangement limits it to 4 verses. The lyrics in this report are the 12-verse version.

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### **Lyrics (all 12 verses)**

1. *Children, go where I send thee*

*How shall I send thee?*

I'm gonna send thee one by one:

One for the little bitty baby.

*Born, born*

*Born in Bethlehem.*

2. *Children, go where I send thee*

*How shall I send thee?*

I'm gonna send thee two by two:

Two for Paul and Silas,

One for the little bitty babe.

*Born, born*

*Born in Bethlehem.*

3. *Children, go where I send thee*  
*How shall I send thee?*

I'm gonna send thee three by three:  
Three for the Hebrew children,  
Two for Paul and Silas,  
One for the little bitty baby.

*Born, born*

*Born in Bethlehem.*

Four for the four that stood at the door...

Five for the gospel preachers...

Six for the six that never got fixed...

Seven for the seven that never got to heaven...

Eight for the eight that stood at the gate...

Nine for the nine all dressed so fine...

Ten for the ten commandments...

Eleven for the eleven de riders...

Twelve for the twelve Apostles...

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### **I. Meaning of Lyrics and Variations**

This song varies- some of the numbers stand for different things or people.

1-Little bitty Baby.

2-Two for Paul and Silas.

3- Three for the Hebrew Children.

4-for the four who stood at the door- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

5-for the Gospel preachers- the four above plus all the other Gospel preachers.

6-for the jars where the wine was mixed (Miracle at the wedding feast at Cana)

7- seven for the seven who came from Heaven- the Seven-fold spirit of God.

8- Eight for the eight who sealed their fate- The eight people who entered Noah's ark.

9- Nine for the ninety-nine in line- Those waiting while the Good Shepherd sought his one lost sheep.

10- for the ten commandments.

11-for the eleven who went to heaven- The eleven disciples minus Judas Iscariot.

12- for the twelve apostles.

Some popular mistakes and variations-

Six for the six that never got fixed!

Seven for the seven who NEVER got to Heaven

Eight for the eight who stood at the gate

Nine for the nine dressed so fine

Eleven for the eleven deriders ???

Another version:

Twelve for the twelve that went to hell. Eleven for the eleven that couldn't get to heaven. Ten for the ten that couldn't get in. Nine for the nine that dressed so fine. Eight for the eight that stood at the gate. Seven for the seven that went to heaven. Six for the six that couldn't get fixed. Five for the Five ol' virgins. Four for the four that stood at the door. Three for the three old wise men. Two for Joseph and Mary. One for the little bitty baby Wrapped in swaddling clothing. Lying in a manger. Whatcha gonna call that stranger? We're gonna call him JESUS! Born, Born, Born in Bethlehem!

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## **II. Song History**

The version found by Jean Ritchie, best-known member of the Ritchie Family of Kentucky who have been singing authentic folk songs for generations, made this charming carol known to the world. It was discovered at a black school in Kentucky, where it may have been picked up from immigrant miners, and where it may have been sung for the past three centuries.

Jean Ritchie writes about "Little Bitty Baby" (Children Go Where I send Thee) in 1952. "We learned this song from Opal Payne, Hindman, Kentucky ("visiting game-teacher") to all the Knott County Schools. On one of her visits to the Breedings Creek Colored School, she found the children lined up, boys on one side of the room facing girls on the other side of the room singing "Children Go" in answer-back fashion. She took down the song and taught it to the folks at the Hindman Settlement School where she worked. Everyone loved it. It spread like a brushfire. Pauline, my sister who was at the Hindman School then, brought it back to the rest of us.

The verses, which sound like a child's counting game, actually tell the children of God how to go about preaching the gospel. Another version of this same carol also exists, thought to have been brought to the United States by Cornishmen who worked in the copper mines along Lake Superior. This is the version best known in the United States. It is also known as the "12 Apostles" and other titles. It seems to be the first accessible collection of "Children, Go..." in print. Another collection of the song may have been made in 1911 by Shearin and Combs, "Syllabus of Kentucky Folk-Songs," 1911, p. 34 (listed in Randolph, "Ozark Folksongs," not seen). The song is often included in performances of THE classic African American Christmas play: Black Nativity.

There are several quite different branches of this leader and response song. The original American version is based on the old English complex of Twelve Apostles, The Dilly Song, Green Grow the Rushes, Come and I Will Sing Thee, I'll Sing You One Oh, Two for Joseph and Mary, The Ten Commandments, Holy Babe, Children I'm Goin' Way, and Carol of the Twelve Numbers.

The origin is thought to be the Hebrew rubric, "Counting the Omer" and the related Hebrew Chant "Song of the Twelve Numbers" ("Echod Mi Yodea.") This song was well known in many sections of Europe as early as the sixteenth century, when it first appeared as an addition to the German Jewish Passover Haggadah, and may have existed as a Jewish folk song some time before it was printed. A Latin version from a 1630 manuscript lists two testaments, three Patriarchs, four evangelists, five books of Moses, six vessels (of Cana) etc.

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### **III. Jean Ritchie**

**Jean Ritchie** (born [December 8, 1922](#)) is an [American folk](#) singer, songwriter, and [Appalachian dulcimer](#) player. Abigail and Balis Ritchie of [Viper, Perry County, Kentucky](#) had 14 children, and Jean was the youngest. Ten girls slept in one room of the farming family's house in the [Cumberland Mountains](#).

Jean Ritchie quickly memorized songs and performed at local dances and the country fair in [Hazard](#). In the late forties the family acquired a radio and discovered that what they were singing was [hillbilly music](#), a word they had never heard before. In the mid-thirties [Alan Lomax](#) recorded in [Kentucky](#) for the [Library of Congress](#)'s Archive of Folk Song. Among the people he recorded were **The Singing Ritchies**.

In the summer of 1946, she moved to work in the [Henry Street Settlement](#) in [New York](#). There she met [Oscar Brand](#), [Leadbelly](#), and [Pete Seeger](#) and started singing her family songs again. In 1948 she shared the stage with [The Weavers](#), [Woody Guthrie](#) and Betty Sanders at the Spring Fever Hootenanny. Oscar Brand's Folksong Festival on [WNYC](#) radio adopted her as a regular by October 1949.

Ritchie became known as "The Mother of Folk". As well as work songs and ballads, Ritchie knew hymns from the "[Old Regular Baptist](#)" church she attended in [Jeff, Kentucky](#). These were sung as "lining out" songs, in a lingering soulful way. One of the songs they sang was "[Amazing Grace](#)". She wrote some songs, including one on the effects of strip mining in Kentucky. "My Dear Companion" appeared on the album *Trio* recorded by [Linda Ronstadt](#), [Dolly Parton](#), and [Emmylou Harris](#). [Judy Collins](#) not only recorded some of Ritchie's traditional songs, "Tender Ladies" and "Pretty Saro", but used a photograph by George Pickow on the front of her album *Golden Apples of the Sun* (1962). Ritchie's 50th anniversary album was *Mountain Born* (1995), which features her two sons, Peter and Jonathan Pickow. In 1954 Ritchie and George Pickow released some their UK recordings under the name *Field Trip*. It was re-issued in 2001 on the Greenhays label. It has recordings by Elizabeth Cronin, Seamus Ennis, and others, side by side with Ritchie family versions of the same songs.

Ritchie has performed at [Carnegie Hall](#) and at the [Royal Albert Hall](#). Her album, *None But One*, was awarded the Rolling Stone Critics award in 1977.

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#### **IV. Ruth Elaine Schram**

**Ruth Elaine Schram** wrote her first song at the age of twelve, and her first octavo was published twenty years later, in 1988. In 1992, she became a full-time composer and arranger and now has over 1,500 published works. Over twelve million copies of her songs have been purchased in their various venues, and she has been a recipient of the ASCAP Special Award each year since 1990. In addition to her choral music for church and school choirs, her songs appear on thirty albums (four of which have been Dove Award Finalists) and numerous children's videos, including sixteen songs on four gold videos, and four songs on one multi-platinum video. Her songs have also appeared on such diverse television shows as "The 700 Club" and HBO's acclaimed series "The Sopranos."

Ruthie began piano and theory lessons at the age of five. She studied music at Lancaster Bible College and Millersville State College and taught Elementary Music in Pennsylvania for several years. She now lives in Birmingham, Alabama with her husband, [Scott Schram](#) (his site, not music related), and they have two grown daughters, Crystie and Celsie.

Her current published works, with audio excerpts and select pages of the scores, are listed on her web site: [choralmusic.com](http://choralmusic.com)

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#### **Audio Links and Discography**

*If you subscribe to iTunes, BuyMusic, Rhapsody or a similar service, keyword in "Children Go Where I Send Thee" and then you can listen to a sample from each artist.*

#### ***YouTubes***

Johnny Cash <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bmOPltLGG>  
Crimson River Quartet <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8ytiMpcYgk&feature=related>  
Hall & Oates <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8gxZVTrYRQ&feature=related>  
Peter Paul & Mary <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s-A5YfaA8I&feature=related>  
Nina Simone <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cA2ingkztQM&feature=related>  
Tennessee Ernie Ford <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwqWcn2gbTM&feature=related>

*These select recordings can be purchased online:*

<http://tinyurl.com/3mz22m>  
<http://tinyurl.com/4ulrwj>  
<http://tinyurl.com/4y43pw>  
<http://tinyurl.com/466tbd>

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## **References:**

The above article about the song “Children Go Where I Send Thee” was extracted from these websites. For more information, please read the articles:

<http://tiny.cc/8p8zz>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children,\\_Go\\_Where\\_I\\_Send\\_Thee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children,_Go_Where_I_Send_Thee)

<http://www.mudcat.org/@displaysong.cfm?SongID=1163>

<http://www.mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=5139&messages=34#29234>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean\\_Ritchie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Ritchie)

<http://choralmusic.com/bio.htm>