Today the church celebrates the Feast Day of Christina Rossetti, a 19th-century Anglican poet. Rossetti was born in 1830, one of four children of the poet Gabriele Rossetti and his wife, Frances Polidori. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the eldest child, became a famous artist who helped establish the Pre-Raphaelite movement in painting. Several of his most famous works were modeled by his sister Christina.

Christina was a lively child, educated by her parents, and began writing stories and poems at an early age. By the time she was 14, however, she began suffering from nervous disorders and declining health. During this time, she became fascinated by the Anglo-Catholic movement within the Church of England, and she remained a devout Anglican for the rest of her life. Her writing is characterized by its deeply infused religious and devotional themes.

“Holy Women, Holy Men” (Church Publishing, 2010) explains: “Over 500 of her poems were devotional. They were related to the liturgy, to the feasts and fasts of the liturgical year, and to biblical ‘dialogues’ with Christ” (p. 348).
Two of Rossetti’s poems appear in our Hymnal as Christmas carols – #84 “Love came down at Christmas” and #112 “In the bleak midwinter.” Hymn #112 begins:

In the bleak mid-winter,
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter,
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ. ...

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air -
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

Collect for Christina Rossetti
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 (“Holy Women, Holy Men,” p. 349).

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