

Alexander Massey

The Four Children

Song for Pesach/Passover

including an essay-commentary
on the text and music

Shir Publications

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The Four Children

The fun of this song is all in the lyrics (printed below). First, the chorus loses more words each time it happens, and, by doing so, gradually reveals the differences between the four children:

- In Chorus 2, the Wise child talks about 'us', includes him/herself as part of the *seder* and story, and wants, as the next generation, to receive and learn the tradition and its meanings.
- In Chorus 3, the Wicked child leaves out the second line, excluding him/herself from being part of the *seder* or story, rejecting both connection to the people, and the values that the story teaches.
- More words are removed in Chorus 4, so that the Simple child doesn't even refer to the story, doesn't seem to understand anything about what is going on, but is open to learning.
- In Chorus 5 (Silent child), the lyrics disappear completely.

Second, each verse has a pun, sometimes English, sometimes between the Hebrew and English, that describes each child:

- Verse 2, for the Wise child, puns with "whys".
- Verse 3, for the Wicked (Heb. *rasha*) child, puns with "rasher".
- Verse 4, for the Simple (Heb. *tam*) child, puns with "time".
- Verse 5, for the Silent child, puns with "sigh lent". (The absence of the Chorus lyrics afterwards also means that we hear accompanying voice part singing the word 'dumb'.)

The Lyrics

What is this story to you?
And what does our God command us to do?

1. Wise, wicked, simple, silent – what's in a label?
Night of questions, night of wonders – all are welcome at our table.
What is this story to you?
And what does our God command us to do?

2. The first child looked for answers with touch, smell, taste, ears and eyes
For the who, how, when, where, whats and whys.
What is this story to you?
And what does our God command us to do?

3. The second child spoke like a wicked gate crasher;
His question seemed a whole lot rasher.
What is this story to you?
[SILENCE]

4. The third child thought the season had no reason or rhyme,
And wondered why Pesach couldn't be a simple time.

What is this? [SILENCE]
[SILENCE]

5. The fourth child's sigh lent mystery. Was she awed, bored or afraid?
She didn't ask a question, and still she stayed ...
[SILENCE]

6. Wise, wicked, simple, silent – what's in a label?
Night of questions, night of wonders – all are welcome at our table.
What is this story to you?
And what does our God command us to do?

Performance notes

1. This can be sung solo, but is more effective with the second part included.

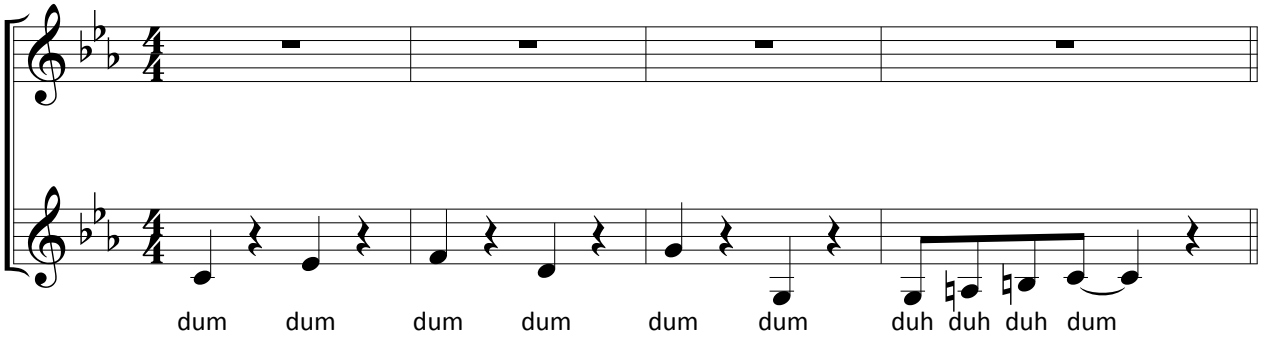
The Four Children

Music: Alexander Massey

Words: Alexander Massey

Not too fast ♩ = 120

1



2

dum dum dum dum dum dum duh duh duh dum

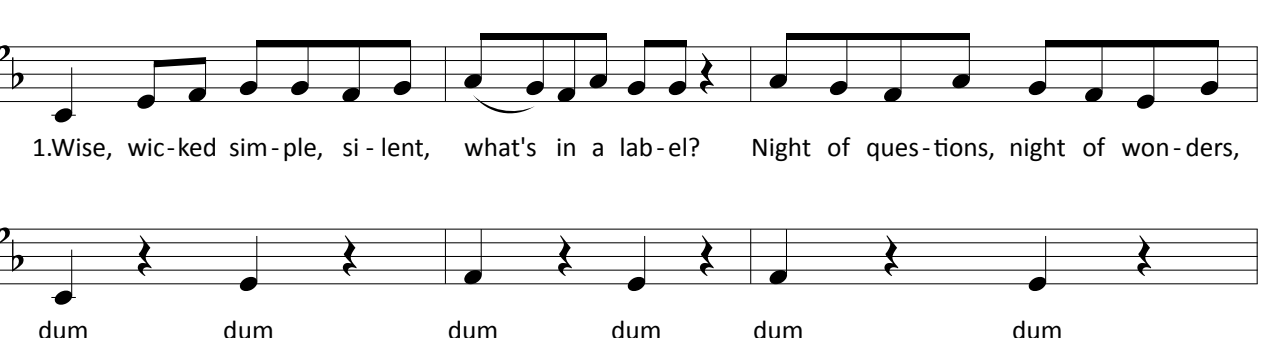
5



What is this sto-ry to you? And what does our God com-mand us to do? —

dum dum dum dum dum dum duh duh duh dum

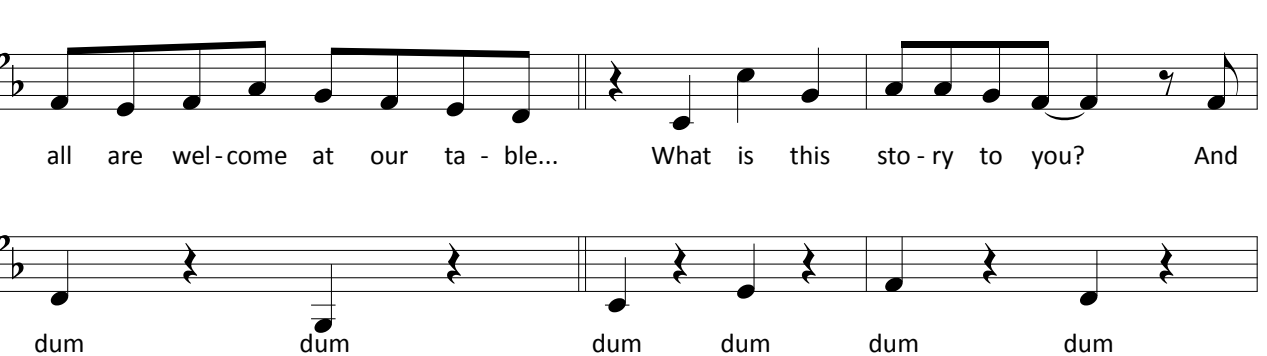
9



1.Wise, wic-ked sim-ple, si-lent, what's in a lab-el? Night of ques-tions, night of won-ders,

dum dum dum dum dum dum

12



all are wel-come at our ta-ble... What is this sto-ry to you? And

dum dum dum dum dum dum

15

what does our God com-mand us to do? — 2.The first child looked for ans-wers with touch,

dum dum duh duh duh dum dum dum

18

smell, taste, ears and eyes For the who, how, when, where, whats and WHYS —

dum dum dum dum dum dum

21

What is this sto-ry to you? And what does our — God com -

dum dum dum dum dum dum

24

mand us to do? — 3.The se-cond child spoke like a WIC-KED gate crash-er His

dum dum dum dum dum dum dum

27

ques - tion seemed a — whole lot RASH-ER What is this sto-ry to you?

dum dum dum dum dum dum dum

31

4.The third child thought the sea-son had no

dum dum duh duh duh dum dum

34

rea-son or ___ rhyme, and wond-ered why Pe - sach could - n't be a SIM - PLE TIME. ___

dum dum dum dum dum dum

37

What is this? 5.The

dum dum dum dum dum dum duh duh duh dum

41

fourth child's SIGH LENT mys - t'ry; was she awed, bored or a - fraid? She

dum dum dum dum

43

did - n't ask a ques-tion, but still she stayed... ___

dum dum dum dum DUM dum dum dum

47

6. Wise, wic - ked sim - ple, si - lent,

dum dum duh duh duh dum dum dum

50

what's in a lab-el? Night of ques-tions, night of won-ders, all are wel-come at our ta-ble...

dum dum dum dum dum dum

53

What is this sto-ry to you? And what does our God com-mand us to do? —

dum dum dum dum dum dum duh duh duh dum