

Finding the Sacred in Poetry:



Poems of Winter Advent Nativity

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Feasting of the King

Now if a president, or earthly lord
Should of his own accord, himself invite
And say “I’ll be your guest tomorrow night”—
How we would stir ourselves, call and command
All hands to work. Let no one idle stand.
Let’s set fine tables in the hall,
See they are fitted all—that there’s room to eat.
And that they lack no meat.
Let every candlestick be burnished bright
That without candles they give light.
Look to the presents, plush cushions on the cha
And garlands decorating the stairs.

Thus, if a king were coming, would we do.
And with good reason, too.
For it’s a proper thing
To show honor to an earthly king.

But, at the coming of the King of Heaven,
We’re all at “six and seven”.
We flounder in our sin,
Christ finds no chamber in the inn.
We entertain him always like a stranger,
And—as at first—
Still lodge him in the manger.

anonymous



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The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy



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Annunciation

Artists clutter the picture
with lilies, cherubim,
a book. They should show
the void: immense and gaping,
an abyss yawning, ignorant,
aimless, hollow, unredeemed.

Intense as a laser in her
such seeding, such turmoil
surging to birth
it made the lilies look
limp, the cherubs bony
the book blank.

She saw the tension: a
world pivoting on its hunger
poised for her answer
balanced against a child, a brittle sword.
Then she said yes.

Kathy Coffey



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Emmanuel

Emmanuel
You come in silence
to my world of crooked noisy places,
places rough with agendas
that leave me bruised,
spirit light low,
a bare glowing ember.

Emmanuel
I will give you quiet moments,
bits of silence stolen
in the clamor of the streets.

Let my silence straighten
a way for you
to smooth my rough spots,
to heal my bruised spirit,
to fan my faith's faint flame,
to prepare in me a vessel
for your incarnation.

•••••
• We are all meant to be
• mothers of God for God is
• always needing to be born.
•
• Meister Eckhart
•
•••••

by Lisa Wells Isenhower from Alive Now! _Nov/Dec. 1990

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Journey of the Magi

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.



There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

T.S. Eliot

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting--
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver



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It wasn't that long ago
that he'd spoken these stars
into being
and this woman's life
was just a thought in his mind.
He'd smiled down on her birth
and entered her name in his pages
perhaps with an asterisk
denoting plans too sacred to be spoken
but pondered in his heart.

Now newborn,
in wide-eyed wonder
he gazes up at his creation.
His hand that hurled the world
holds tight his mother's finger.
Holy light
spills across her face
and she weeps
silent wondering tears
to know she holds the One
who has so long held her.

Joan Rae Mills

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Snow

Snow,
blessed snow,
comes out of the sky
like bleached flies.
The ground is no longer naked.
The ground has on its clothes.
The trees poke out of sheets
and each branch wears the sock of God.



There is hope.
There is hope everywhere.
I bite it.
Someone once said:
Don't bite till you know
if it's bread or stone.
What I bite is all bread,
rising, yeasty as a cloud.

There is hope.
There is hope everywhere.
Today God gives milk
and I have the pail.

"Snow" by Anne Sexton, from *The Awful Rowing Toward God*.

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Let the Day Come, Lord

Let the day come, Lord,
when our misery
will find your mercy.

Let the day come, Lord,
when our poverty
will find your riches.

Let the day come, Lord,
when our path
will find the way to your house.

Let the day come, Lord,
when our tears
will find your smile.

Let the day come, Lord,
when our joy
will find your heaven.

Let the day come, Lord,
when your church
will find the Kingdom.

May you be blest,
for that day
when our eyes will find your face!
Throughout all the days of our life
you have not ceased to come before us
in your son, our brother.

Adapted from a prayer by Lucien Deiss

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