

# Seeking the Inward Way: Poems of Advent, Christmas, and Winter Longings



So may you grow ever more intimate  
With the inward way, the deepening way,  
Where filling is emptying, emptying is filling ~  
At one with the mystery, at one.  
—Tracy Shaw

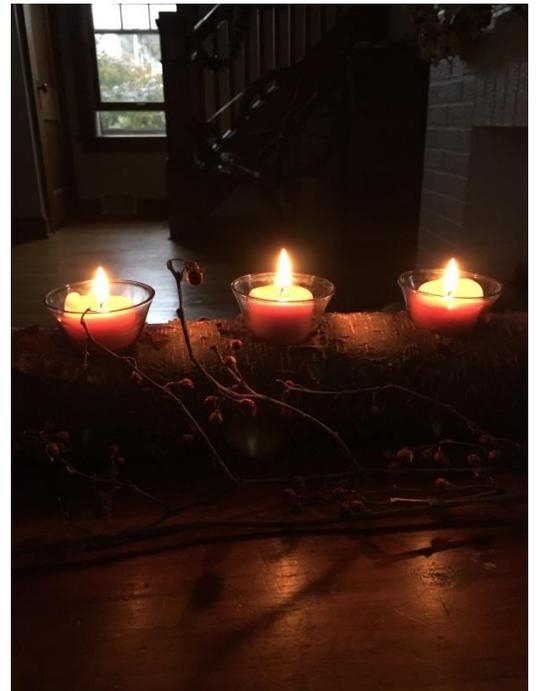
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## **A Blessing for the Inward Way**

May you learn to dwell  
Below the surface of the days  
At home with the ebb and flow of  
Your own heart's tides.  
May you find the womb space at the center of your Life,  
There grow wise in the sacred rhythm  
Of filling and emptying,  
Emptying and filling.  
There, held safe,  
May you surrender to the unknown  
As completely as the dark moon  
Empties herself into the secret embrace of her  
Beloved, the Sun.  
There may you cherish hope of renewal  
As tenderly as the crescent moon  
Cradles the dark in the curve of her arm,  
Enfolding, quickening with life new born.  
And may you always open to the flow of love  
As voluptuously as the moon at full,  
Until filled, overflowing, you pour  
Love's gifts out into the world.  
So may you grow ever more intimate  
With the inward way, the deepening way,  
Where filling is emptying, emptying is filling ~  
At one with the mystery, at one.

By Tracy Shaw



## **Annunciation to Mary**

The angel's entrance (you must realize)  
was not what made her frightened. The surprise  
he gave her by his coming was no more  
than sun or moon-beam stirring on the floor  
would give another, — she had long since grown  
used to the form that angels wear, descending;

never imaging this coming-down  
was hard for them. (O it's past comprehending,  
how pure she was. Did not one day, a hind  
that rested in a wood, watchfully staring,  
feel her deep influence, and did it not  
conceive the unicorn, then, without pairing,  
the pure beast, beast which light begot, — )  
No, not to see him enter, but to find  
the youthful angel's countenance inclined  
so near to her; that when he looked, and she  
looked up at him, their looks so merged in one  
the world outside grew vacant, suddenly,  
and all things being seen, endured and done  
were crowded into them: just she and he  
eye and its pasture, visions and its view,  
here at the point and at this point alone:-  
see, this arouses fear. Such fear both knew.

From *The Life of Mary* by Rainer Maria Rilke – From *Selected Work*,  
Vol. II Poetry, translated by J.B. Leishman, Hogarth Press, © 1960.

### **In Mary-Darkness**

I live my Advent in the womb of Mary  
And on one night when a great star swings free  
From its high mooring and walks down the sky  
To be the dot above the Christus i,  
I shall be born of her by blessed grace.  
I wait in Mary-darkness, faith's walled place,  
With hope's expectance of nativity.  
I knew for long she carried me and fed me,  
Guarded and loved me, though I could not see,  
But only now, with inward jubilee,  
I come upon earth's most amazing knowledge:  
Someone is hidden in this dark with me.

By Jessica Powers

From the Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers (1905-1988), Carmelite nun and poet, edited by Regina Siegfried, ASC, and Robert F. Morneau, published by Sheed and Ward, 1989.

### **Disturb us, O Lord**

when we are too well-pleased with ourselves  
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,  
because we sailed too close to the shore.

#### *Disturb us, O Lord*

when with the abundance of things we possess,  
we have lost our thirst for the water of life  
when, having fallen in love with time,  
we have ceased to dream of eternity  
and in our efforts to build a new earth,  
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.

#### *Stir us, O Lord*

to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas  
where storms show Thy mastery,  
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of our hopes  
and invited the brave to follow.

Amen

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu adapted this from an original prayer  
by Sir Francis Drake.

### **The Refugees**

Into the wild and painful cold of the starless winter night came the  
refugees, slowly making their way to the border.

The man, stooped from age or anxiety, hurried his small family through the  
wind.

Bearded and dark, his skin rough and cracked from the cold, his frame looming large in spite of the slumped shoulders:

He looked like a man who could take care of whatever came at them from the dark.

Unless, of course, there were too many of them.

One man he could handle ... two, even ... but a border patrol ... they wouldn't have a chance.

His eyes, black and alert, darted from side to side, then over his shoulder, then back again forward.

Had they been seen?

Had they been heard?

Every rustle of wind, every sigh from the child, sent terror through his chest.

Was this the way?

Even the stars had been unkind – had hidden themselves in the ink of night so that the man could not read their way.

Only the wind ... was it enough?

Only the wind and his innate sense of direction ... to wander in circles through the night?

Or to safely make their way to the border only to find the authorities waiting for them?

He glanced at the young woman, his bride.

No more than a child herself, she nuzzled their newborn, kissing his neck.

She looked up, caught his eye, and smiled.

Oh, how the homelessness had taken its toll on her!

Her eyes were red, her young face lined, her lovely hair matted from inattention, her clothes stained from milk and baby, her hands chapped from the raw wind of winter.

She hardly had time to recover from childbirth when word had come that they were hunted, and they fled with only a little bread, the remaining wine, and a very small portion of cheese.

Suddenly, the child began to make small noises.

The man drew his breath in sharply; the woman quietly put the child to breast.

Fear ... long dread-filled moments ...

Huddled, the family stood still in the long silence.

At last the man breathed deeply again, reassured they had not been heard.

And into the night continued Mary and Joseph and the Babe.

By Ann Weems



Flight into Egypt, painting by Eugène Girardet, born 1850, date unknown. Wikimedia

## **Into This Silent Night**

Into this silent night

we make our weary way

we know not where

just when the light becomes it's

darkest and we cannot see our path,

just then

is when the angels rush in,

their hands full of stars.

By Ann Weems

## **It is Not Over**

It is not over

this birthing.

There are always newer skies

into which

God can throw stars.

When we begin to think

that we can predict the Advent of God,

that we can box the Christ  
in a stable in Bethlehem,  
that's just the time  
that God will be born  
in a place we can't imagine and won't believe.

Those who wait for God  
watch with their hearts and not their eyes,  
listening  
always listening  
for angel words.

By Ann Weems



### **Welcome Morning**

There is joy  
in all:  
in the hair I brush each morning,  
in the Cannon towel, newly washed,  
that I rub my body with each morning,  
in the chapel of eggs I cook  
each morning,  
in the outcry from the kettle  
that heats my coffee  
each morning,  
in the spoon and the chair  
that cry "hello there, Anne"  
each morning,  
in the godhead of the table  
that I set my silver, plate, cup upon  
each morning.

All this is God,

right here in my pea-green house  
each morning  
and I mean,  
though often forget,  
to give thanks,  
to faint down by the kitchen table  
in a prayer of rejoicing  
as the holy birds at the kitchen window  
peck into their marriage of seeds.

So while I think of it,  
let me paint a thank-you on my palm  
for this God, this laughter of the morning,  
lest it go unspoken.

The Joy that isn't shared, I've heard,  
dies young.

By Anne Sexton

### **Making the House Ready for the Lord**

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed  
but  
Still nothing is as shining as it should be  
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an  
uproar of mice—it is the season of their  
many children. What shall I do? And under  
the eaves  
and through the walls the squirrels  
have gnawed their ragged entrances—but it is the  
season when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And  
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the  
cupboard while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;  
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling  
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly  
up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will  
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox  
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose,  
know that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,  
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

By Mary Oliver



## A New Year's Day Blessing

May your home always be too  
small to hold all your friends.  
May your heart remain ever supple,  
fearless in the face of threat,  
jubilant in the grip of grace.  
May your hands remain open,  
caressing, never clenched,  
save to pound the doors  
of all who barter justice  
to the highest bidder.  
May your heroes be earthy,  
dusty-shoed and rumpled,  
hallowed but unhaloed,  
guiding you through seasons  
of tremor and travail, apprenticed  
to the godly art of giggling  
amid haggard news and  
portentous circumstance.  
May your hankering be  
in rhythm with heaven's,  
whose covenant vows a dusty  
intersection with our own:  
when creation's hope and history rhyme.  
May hosannas lilt from your lungs:  
God is not done;  
God is not yet done.  
All flesh, I am told, will behold;  
will surely behold.

*By Ken Sehested* The first stanza of this poem, which inspired the composition, is a traditional Irish blessing. The line when hope and history rhyme" is taken from a Seamus Heaney poem entitled "On the far side of revenge." *Benedicere*, a Latin word, means "to bless."

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