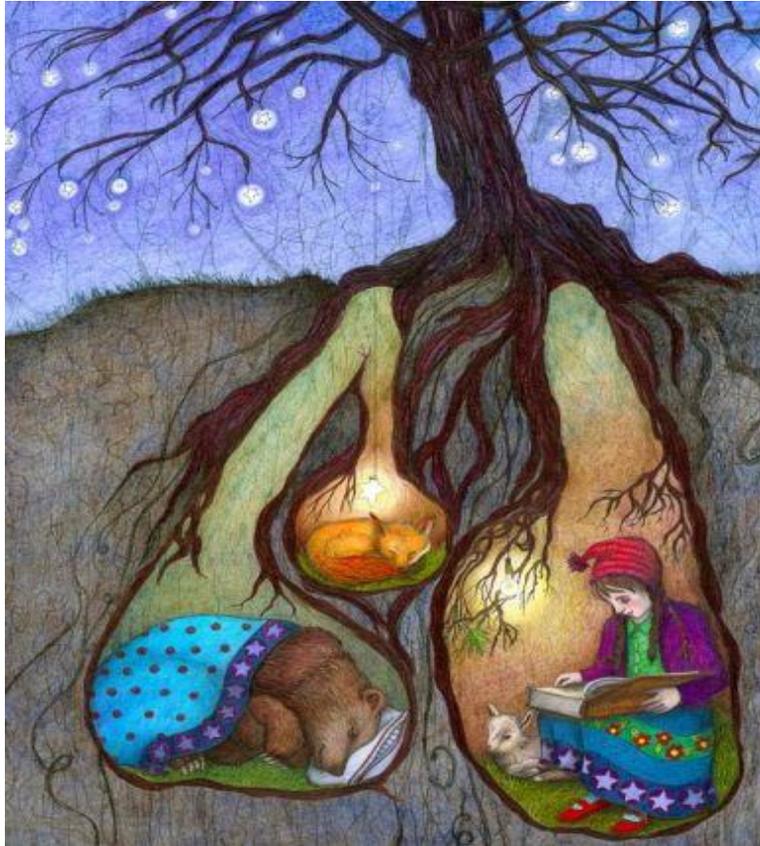


Upon a Midnight: Poems of Advent and Christmastide



Artwork by jessica boehman illustrations

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Materials developed by Kim Langley, M.Ed. for WordSPA ministry

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

O ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing;
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing

For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophets seen of old,
When with the ever-circling years
Shall come the time foretold,
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world gives back the song
Which now the angels sing.



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Touched by an Angel

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.



Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

By Maya Angelou

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Advent Calendar

He will come like last leaf's fall.
One night when the November wind
has flayed the trees to bone, and earth
wakes choking on the mould,
the soft shroud's folding.
He will come like frost.
One morning when the shrinking earth
opens on mist, to find itself
arrested in the net
of alien, sword-set beauty.
He will come like dark.
One evening when the bursting red
December sun draws up the sheet
and penny-masks its eye to yield
the star-snowed fields of sky.
He will come, will come,
will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.

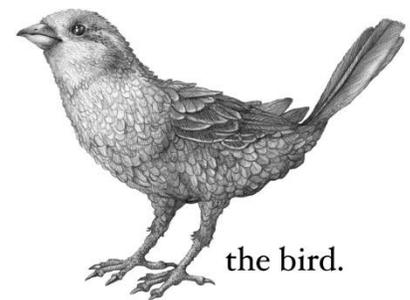


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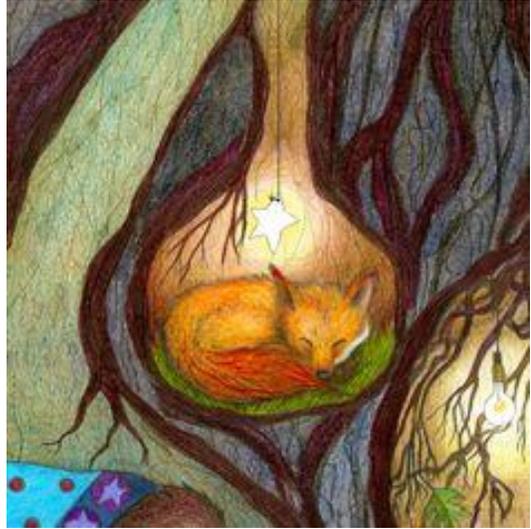
By Rowan Williams, originally printed in The Guardian

Blessing That Holds A Nest in Its Branches

The emptiness
that you have been holding
for such a long season now;
that ache in your chest
that goes with you
night and day
in your sleeping,



your rising—
think of this
not as a mere hollow,
the void left from
the life that has leached out
of you.
Think of it like this:
as the space being prepared
for the seed.
Think of it
as your earth that dreams
of the branches
the seed contains.
Think of it
as your heart making ready
to welcome the nest
its branches will hold.



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By Jan Richardson, from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*

Winter Apple

Let the apple ripen
on the branch
beyond your need
to take it down.

Let the coolness
of autumn
and the breathing,
blowing wind
test its adherence
to endurance,
let the others fall.

Wait longer
than you would,

go against yourself,
find the pale nobility
of quiet that ripening
demands,
watch with patience
as the silhouette emerges
and the leaves fall,
see it become
a solitary roundness
against a greying sky,
let winter come
and the first
frost threaten,
and then wake
one morning
to see the breath
of winter
has haloed
its redness
with light.

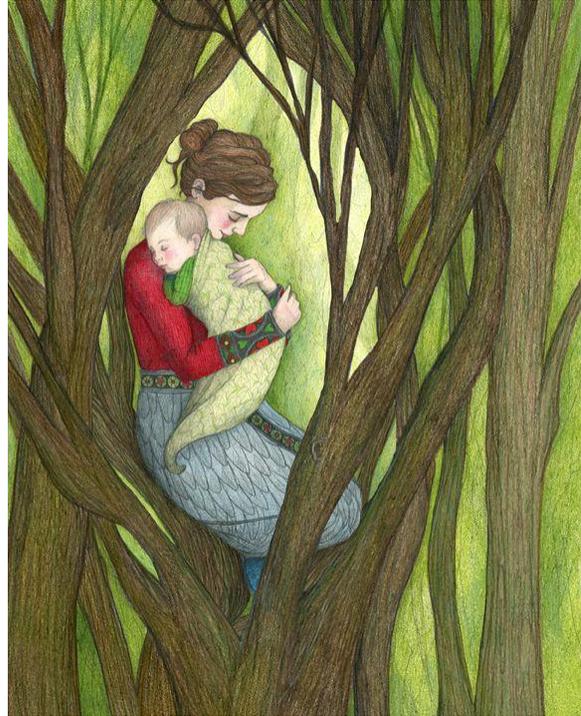
So that a full
two months
after you
should have
taken the apple
down,
you hold it in
your closed hand
at last and bite
into the cool
sweetness
spread evenly
through every
single atom
of a pale
and yielding



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structure,
so that you taste
on that cold,
grey day,
not only
the after reward
of a patience
remembered,
not only
the summer
sunlight
of a postponed
perfection,
but the sweet,
inward stillness
of the wait itself.

By David Whyte, in *Pilgrim*



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Last Scraps of Color in Missouri

Today I passed a stand
of trees: tall, closely packed,
bare and almost black
from rain. But underneath,
I saw smaller trees, just
getting started on their slow
snatch-and-grab of sky,
and I saw these were golden
still, and they glowed
like campfires in the dark.
Lately I'd been wanting
a little light — and there it was,
and all I had to do was turn
my gaze a few degrees
from center. Some blessings
find us when we move to them —
they're waiting only to be seen.
Near the end of a difficult year,

may we spot the light,
as we breathe in prayer
or supplication: Show me,
show me, show me.

By Karen Craig

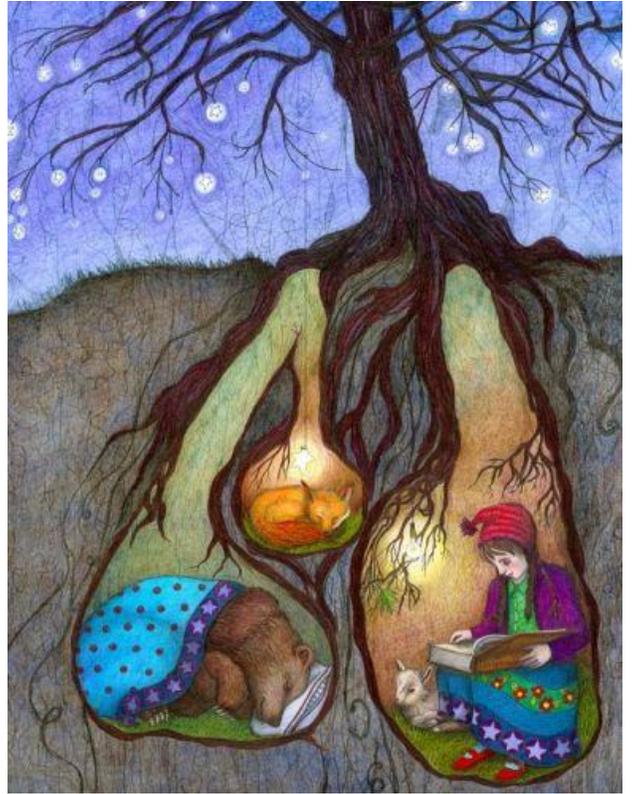


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Winter Grace

If you have seen the snow
under the lamppost
piled up like a white beaver hat on the picnic table
or somewhere slowly falling
into the brook
to be swallowed by water,
then you have seen beauty
and know it for its transience.
And if you have gone out in the snow

for only the pleasure
of walking barely protected
from the galaxies,
the flakes settling on your parka
like the dust from just-born stars,
the cold waking you
as if from long sleeping,
then you can understand
how, more often than not,
truth is found in silence,
how the natural world comes to you
if you go out to meet it,
its icy ditches filled with dead weeds,
its vacant birdhouses, and dens
full of the sleeping.
But this is the slowed-down season
held fast by darkness
and if no one comes to keep you company
then keep watch over your own solitude.
In that stillness, you will learn
with your whole body
the significance of cold
and the night,
which is otherwise always eluding you.



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By Patricia Fargnoli, *Winter* (Hobblebush Books, 2013)

For a New Beginning

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage
kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and
dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits
you.

By John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space
Between Us*, Doubleday, 2008.



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