

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL
GUIDE 2011



The Annunciation, Henry Ossawa Tanner

*AND THE ANGEL SAID UNTO HER,
FEAR NOT, MARY: FOR THOU HAST
FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD.*

The Coming of the Light

...Christmas celebrates the dawn of the light of the world. The powers of darkness are overcome by His coming to share our life. The long reign of sin is ended and grace has been poured out upon the earth. The sun of justice has arisen, and evil is vanquished."

Perhaps the hardest thing to remember about Christmas is this: "It celebrates the incarnation, not just the nativity. The incarnation is an ongoing process of salvation, while the nativity is the once-for-all-historical event of Bethlehem. We do not really celebrate Christ's 'birthday,' remembering something that happened long ago. We celebrate the stupendous fact of the incarnation, God entering our world so thoroughly that nothing has been the same since. And God continues to take flesh in our midst, in the men and women and children who form His body today. And the birth we celebrate is not just the past historical event, but Christ's continuing birth in his members, accomplished by the power of the Spirit through the waters of baptism.

"...What we celebrate is our redemption in Christ and the transformation of all creation by the presence of the divine in our midst."

November 27—December 3

³³Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Watch therefore--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning-- ³⁶lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Watch."

— Mark 13: 33-37



It was a time like this,
War and tumult of war,
a horror in the air.
Hungry yawned the abyss-
and yet there came the star
and the child most wonderfully there.

It was a time like this
of fear and lust for power,
license and greed and blight-
and yet the Prince of bliss
came into the darkest hour
in quiet and silent light.

And in a time like this
how celebrate his birth
when all things fall apart?
Ah! Wonderful it is
with no room on the earth
the stable is our heart.

—Madeleine L'Engle

Christmas Dream

“...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.”

Amiably at home with virtue and evil -
the righteousness of Joseph and Herod's
wickedness – I'm ever and always a stranger to grace.
I need this annual angel visitation.

- this sudden drive by dream into reality -
to know the virgin conceives and God is with us.
The dream powers its way through winter weather
and gives me vision to see the Jesus gift.

Light from the dream lasts a year. Through
Equinox and solstice I am given twelve months

Of daylight by which to build the crèche where my
Redeemer lives. The fetus of praise grows

deep in my spirit. As autumn wanes I count
the days until I bear the dream again.

—Eugene Peterson



¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God; ³ all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

— John 1: 1–5

First Coming

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine. He did not wait

till hearts were pure. In joy he came
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

— Madeleine L'Engle



Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

— Psalm 119:105

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

— Isaiah 40: 1—5



¹ O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. ² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. ³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. ⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. ⁵ My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips ⁶ when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; ⁷ for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. ⁸ My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. ⁹ But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth.

— Psalm 63: 1 – 9

Creator of the stars of night,
Thy people's everlasting Light:
O Christ, Redeemer, save us all
And hear Thy servants when they call.

Thou, grieving that the ancient curse
Should doom to death a universe,
Hast found the healing, full of grace,
To cure and save our ruined race.

Thou can'st the Bridegroom of the bride,
As drew the world to eventide,
The spotless Victim all divine
Proceeding from a virgin shrine.

At whose dread name, majestic now,
All knees must bend, all hearts must bow;
All things celestial Thee shall own,
And things terrestrial, Lord alone.

O thou, whose coming is with dread
To judge the living and the dead,
Preserve us from the ancient foe
while still we dwell on earth below.

To God the Father and the Son
And Holy Spirit, Three in One,
Praise, honor, might, and glory be
From age to age eternally.

— Evening hymn for Advent
Eighth Century

Our time is a time of waiting; waiting is its special destiny.
And every time is a time of waiting, waiting for the breaking
in of eternity. All time runs forward. All time, both history
and in personal life, is expectation. Time itself is waiting,
waiting not for another time, but for that which is eternal.

— Paul Tillich



Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.
There is a time for the evening under starlight,
A time for the evening under lamplight
(The evening with the photograph album).
Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.
Old men ought to be explorers
Here or there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

— T.S. Elliot

Advent is the time for rousing. Man is shaken to the very depths, so that he may wake up to the truth of himself. The primary condition for a fruitful and rewarding Advent is renunciation, surrender. Man must let go of all his mistaken dreams, his conceited poses and arrogant gestures, all the pretences with which he hopes to deceive himself and others. If he fails to do this, stark reality may take hold of him and rouse him forcibly in a way that will entail both anxiety and suffering.

The kind of awakening that literally shocks man's whole being is part and parcel of the Advent idea. A deep emotional experience like this is necessary to kindle the inner light which confirms the blessing and the promise of the Lord. A shattering awakening; that is the necessary preliminary. Life only begins when the whole framework is shaken. There can be no proper preparation without this. It is precisely in the shock of rousing while he is still deep in the helpless, semi-conscious state, in the pitiable weakness of that borderland between sleep and waking, that man finds the golden thread which binds earth to heaven and gives the benighted soul some inkling of the fullness it is capable of realizing and is called upon to realize.

— Alfred Delp



Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

— Isaiah 7:14

December 4–December 10

O Savior, rend the heavens wide;
Come down, come down with mighty stride;
Unlock the gates, the doors break down;
Unbar the way to heaven's crown.

O Father, light from heaven lend;
As morning dew, O Son, descend.
Drop down, you clouds, the life of spring:
To Jacob's line rain down the King.

O earth, in flow'ring bud be seen;
Clothe hill and dale in garb of green.
Bring forth, O earth, a blossom rare,
Our Savior, sprung from meadow fair.

O Fount of hope, how long, how long?
When will You come with comfort strong?
O come, O come, Your throne forego;
Console us in our vale of woe.

O Morning Star, O radiant Sun,
When will our hearts behold Your dawn?
O Sun, arise; without Your light
We grope in gloom and dark of night.

Sin's dreadful doom before us lies;
Grim death looms fierce before our eyes.
O come, lead us with mighty hand
From exile to our promised land.

There shall we all our praises bring
And sing to You, our Savior King;
There shall we laud You and adore
Forever and forevermore.

— Friedrich von Spee
Seventeenth century

Lo, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day.

— Malachi 3:23



You must be men and women of ceaseless hope, because only tomorrow can today's human and Christian promise be realized; and every tomorrow will have its own tomorrow, world without end. Every human act, every Christian act, is an act of hope. But that means you must be men and women of the present, you must live this moment - really live it, not just endure it - because this very moment, for all its imperfection and frustration, because of its imperfection and frustration, is pregnant with all sorts of possibilities, is pregnant with the future, is pregnant with love, is pregnant with Christ.

— Walter J. Burghardt



Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

— Reinhold Niebuhr

Little Lamb, who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee;
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb
He is meek, and He is mild,
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

—William Blake



Behold, I am coming soon.

— Revelation 22:7

The large rooms of which you are so proud are in fact your shame. They are big enough to hold crowds--and also big enough to shut out the voices of the poor...There is your sister or brother, naked, crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering.

— Ambrose, 4th Century



In an age which offers a variety of escapes from the human condition, Christians are more than ever a sign of contradiction. They continue to believe that the search for God must begin with the acceptance of the human. They believe this because it is in the stable of humanity that God has come in search of us.

In the human experience of Jesus, God became available to us as the depth of human life. Thus, a Christian believes that the experience of ultimate meaning comes not from a leap out of the human condition, but a journey through its dark waters.

— John Heagle



Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

— Malachi 3:1

Late have I loved you,
O Beauty so ancient and so new,
late have I loved you!
You were within me, but I was outside,
and it was there that I searched for you.
In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you
created.
You were with me, but I was not with you.
Created things kept me from you;
yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at
all.
You called, you shouted, and you broke through my
deafness.
You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.
You breathed your fragrance on me;
I drew in breath and now I pant for you.
I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more.
You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

— Augustine
Fifth Century



We live always during advent. We are always waiting for the
Messiah to come. The Messiah has come, but is not yet fully
manifest. The Messiah is not fully manifest in each of our
souls, not fully manifest in humankind as a whole: that is to
say, that just as Christ was born according to the flesh in Beth-
lehem of Judah, so must he be born according to the spirit in
each of our souls.

— Jean Danielou

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day...

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

— Martin Luther King, Jr.



³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

— Isaiah 40:3

Our brokenness is the wound
through which the full power of God
can penetrate our being and transfigure us in God.
Loneliness is not something from which we must flee
but the place from where we can cry out to God,
where God will find us and we can find God.
Yes, through our wounds the power of God can penetrate us
and become like rivers of living water to irrigate the arid earth
within us.
Thus we may irrigate the arid earth of others,
so that hope and love are reborn.

—Jean Vanier



Because the beginning shall remind us of the end and the first
coming of the second coming.

— T.S. Eliot



To listen – in faith – to find one's way and have the feeling
that, under God, one is really finding it again. This is like
playing blindman's bluff; deprived of sight, I have, in com-
pensation, to sharpen all my other senses, to grope my way
and recognize myself as I pass my fingers over the faces of my
friends and thus find what was mine already and had been
there all the time. What I would have known all the time was
there, had I not blindfolded myself.

— Dag Hammarskjöld

The will of God be done by us,
The law of God be kept by us,
Our evil will controlled by us,
Our tongue in check be held by us,
Repentance timely made by us,
Christ's passion understood by us,
Each sinful crime be shunned by us,
Much on the End be mused by us,
And death be blessed found by us,
With angel's music heard by us,
And God's high praises sung by us,
For ever and for aye.

— Celtic Hymn



Earth grown old, yet still so green,
Deep beneath her crust of cold
Nurses fire unfelt, unseen:
Earth grown old.
We who live are quickly told:
Millions more lie hid between
Inner swathings of her fold.
When will fire break up her screen?
When will life burst thro' her mould?
Earth, earth, earth, thy cold is keen,
Earth grown old.

— Christina Rossetti
Nineteenth century

Since Adam, being free to choose,
Chose to imagine he was free
To choose his own necessity,
Lost in his freedom, Man pursues
The shadow of his images:
Today the Unknown seeks the known;
What I am willed to ask, your own
Will has to answer; child, it lies
Within your power of choosing to
Conceive the Child who chooses you.

— W.H. Auden



Good news; but if you ask me what it is, I know not; it is a
track of feet in the snow, it is a lantern showing a path, it is a
door set open.

— G.K. Chesterton



You will see rare beasts, and have unique adventures.
He is the Truth. Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
You will come to a great city that has expected your return for
years. He is the Life. Love Him in the World of the Flesh; And
at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.

—W.H. Auden, from "For the Time Being"

A spotless Rose is blowing
Sprung from a tender root,
Of ancient seers' foreshowing,
Of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter
And in the dark midnight.
The Rose which I am singing,
Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing
In Mary, purest Maid;
For through our God's great love and might
The blessed babe she bare us
In a cold, cold winter's night.

— Catherine Winkworth



The Christmas spirit
is that hope which tenaciously clings
to the hearts of the faithful
and announces in the face
of any Herod the world can produce
and all the inn doors slammed in our faces
and all the dark nights of our souls
that with God
All things still are possible,
that even now
Unto us
a child is born!

— Ann Weems

III. The Temptation of St. Joseph

Chorus 1: Joseph, you have heard
What Mary says occurred;
C2: Yes, it may be so.
C3: Is it likely? No.
C1: Mary may be pure,
But, Joseph, are you sure?
C2: How is one to tell?
Suppose, for instance . . . Well . . .
C3: Maybe, maybe not.
C2: But, Joseph, you know what
Your world, of course, will say
About you anyway.

Joseph: Where are you, Father, where?
Caught in the jealous trap
Of an empty house I hear
As I sit alone in the dark
Everything, everything
Making the same stupid remark
Stupidly, stupidly
Over and over again.
Father, what have I done?
Answer me, Father . . .
Answer them . . .

Gabriel: No, you must.
Joseph: How then am I to know,
Father, that you are just?
Give me one reason.

Gabriel: No.
Joseph: All I ask is one
Important and elegant proof
That what my Love had done
Was really at your will
And that your will is Love.
Gabriel: No, you must believe;
Be silent, and sit still.

Narrator 1: Without a change in look or word,
You both must act exactly as before;
N2: Joseph and Mary shall be man and wife
Just as if nothing had occurred.
N1: There is one World of Nature and one Life;
Sin fractures the Vision, not the Fact; for
The Exceptional is always usual
N2: And the Usual exceptional.
To choose what is difficult all one's days
N1: As if it were easy,
N2: That is faith. Joseph, praise.

— W.H. Auden, from "For the Time Being"



¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

— John 3: 16–17

I'd like to be the sort of friend
that you have been to me;
I'd like to be the help that you've been
always glad to be;
I'd like to mean as much to you
each minute of the day
As you have meant, old friend of mine,
to me along the way.

I'd like to do the big things
and the splendid things for you,
To brush the gray out of your skies
and leave them only blue;
I'd like to say the kindly things
that I so oft have heard,
And feel that I could rouse your soul
the way that mine you've stirred.

I'd like to give back the joy
that you have given me,
Yet that were wishing you a need
I hope will never be;
I'd like to make you feel
as rich as I, who travel on
Undaunted in the darkest hours
with you to lean upon.

I'm wishing at this Christmas time
that I could but repay
A portion of the gladness
that you've strewn along the way;
And could I have one wish this year,
this only would it be:
I'd like to be the sort of friend
that you have been to me.

— Edgar Guest

In The Bleak Midwinter

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.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

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.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

– Christina Rossetti



Advent, like its cousin Lent, is a season for prayer and reformation of our hearts. Since it comes at winter time, fire is a fitting sign to help us celebrate Advent...If Christ is to come more fully into our lives this Christmas, if God is to become really incarnate for us, then fire will have to be present in our prayer. Our worship and devotion will have to stoke the kind of fire in our souls that can truly change our hearts. Ours is a great responsibility not to waste this Advent time."

– Edward Hays

What sweeter music can we bring
Than a carol, for to sing
The birth of this, our heavenly King?
Awake the voice! Awake the string!

Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
And give the honor to this day,
That sees December turned to May.

Why does the chilling winter's morn
Smile, like a field beset with corn?
Or smell like a meadow newly-shorn,
Thus, on the sudden? Come and see
The cause, why things thus fragrant be:
'Tis He is born, whose quickening birth
Gives life and luster, public mirth,
To heaven, and the under-earth.

We see him come, and know him ours,
Who, with his sunshine and his showers,
Turns all the patient ground to flowers.
The darling of the world is come,
And fit it is, we find a room
To welcome him. The nobler part
Of all the house here, is the heart.

Which we will give him; and bequeath
This holly, and this ivy wreath,
To do him honour, who's our King,
And Lord of all this revelling.

What sweeter music can we bring,
Than a carol for to sing
The birth of this, our heavenly King?

— Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

Simeon: Here and now the Word which is implicit in the Beginning and in the End is become immediately explicit, and that which hitherto we could only passively fear as the incomprehensible I AM, henceforth we may actively love with comprehension that THOU ART. Wherefore, having seen Him, not in some prophetic vision of what might be, but with the eyes of our own weakness as to what actually is, we are bold to say that we have seen our salvation.

– W.H. Auden, from “For the Time Being”



In the psalms of David,
In the words of the prophets,
In the dream of Joseph,
Your promise is spoken, eternal God,
And takes flesh at last
In the womb of the Virgin.
May Emmanuel find welcome in our hearts,
Take flesh in our lives, and be for all peoples
The welcome advent of redemption and grace.
We ask this through him whose coming is certain,
Whose Day draws near:
Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

– Prayer for the Fourth Week of Advent

Without any rhyme
without any reason
my heart lifts to light
in this bleak season

Believer and wanderer
caught by salvation
stumbler and blunderer
into Creation

In this cold blight
where marrow is frozen
it is God's time
my heart has chosen

In paradox and story
parable and laughter
find I the glory
here in hereafter

—Madeleine L'Engle



¹¹ Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; ¹² the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³ let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

— Romans 13: 11–14

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with the flocks,
then the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal those broken in spirit,
to feed the hungry,
to release the oppressed,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among all peoples,
to make a little music with the heart...
And to radiate the Light of Christ,
every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we
say.
Then the work of Christmas begins.

— Howard Thurman



The implications of the name "Immanuel" are both comforting and unsettling. Comforting, because He has come to share the danger as well as the drudgery of our everyday lives. He desires to weep with us and to wipe away our tears. And what seems most bizarre, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, longs to share in and to be the source of the laughter and the joy we all too rarely know.

— Michael Card

Everlasting God,
in whom we live and move and have our being:
You have made us for yourself,
so that our hearts are restless
until they rest in you.

— Augustine of Hippo (Algeria 354—450)



A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes... and is completely
dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be
opened from the outside, is not a bad picture of Advent.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Let us be contrite, but without anxiety,
For Powers and Times are not gods but mortal gifts from God;
Let us acknowledge our defeats, but without despair,
For all societies and epochs are transient details,
Transmitting an everlasting opportunity
That the Kingdom of Heaven may come, not in our
present
And not in our future, but in the Fullness of Time.

— W.H. Auden, from “For the Time Being”

Lord Jesus,

Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, 'Come Lord Jesus!'

Amen.

— Henri J.M. Nouwen



By far the most important and significant event in the whole course of human history will be celebrated, with or without understanding, at the end of this season, Advent. The towering miracle of God's visit to this planet on which we live will be glossed over, brushed aside, or rendered impotent by over-familiarity. Even by the believer the full weight of the event is not always appreciated. His faith is in Jesus Christ – he believes with all his heart that this man, who lived and died and rose again in Palestine, was truly the Son of God. He may have, in addition, some working experience that the man Jesus is still alive, and yet be largely unaware of the intense meaning of what he believes.

— J.B. Phillips

HOLY SONNET X

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so ;
For those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture[s] be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou'rt slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke ; why swell'st thou then ?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more ; Death, thou shalt die.

— John Donne



How sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in a disorder'd string:
But, for the concord of state and time,
Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.
I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.

— William Shakespeare, Sixteenth Century

HOLY SONNET VII

At the round earth's imagined corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go ;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dea[r]th, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you, whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space ;
For, if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace,
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that's as good
As if Thou hadst seal'd my pardon with Thy blood.

— John Donne



Awake, my soul, arise and shake,
No time to ever ponder,
Keep awake, keep awake
Lest ye be rent asunder.
I will be good, I will be free,
I'll hate the old deceiver.
No earthly tie shall fetter me,
I'll be a good believer

— Shaker Hymn

⁸ And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; ¹¹ for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

— Luke 2: 8—20



Eternity is in love with the production of time.

— William Blake, eighteenth century

⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would
be fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

The Magnificat

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;
⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Christmas Eve

Christmas has a darkness,
Brighter than the blazing noon,
Christmas has a chillness
Warmer than the heat of June,
Christmas has a beauty
Lovelier than the world can show:
For Christmas brings us Jesus,
Brought for us so low.

Earth strike up your music,
Birds that sing and bells that ring;
Heaven has answering music
For all angels soon to sing:
Earth put on your whitest
Bridal robe of spotless snow:
For Christmas brings us Jesus,
Brought for us so low.

– Christina Rossetti



¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

– Isaiah 60: 1–3



*FOR NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE
WITH GOD.*

Luke 1:37

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