



*The Angels Proclaim to the Shepherds the Good News about the Birth of the Savior  
Art by Petrana Petsova.*

*December 1*

## *An Advent Meditation*

Our dog can sense a visitor a long way off.  
He begins to growl and mutter in low tones.  
During this Advent season I wait and look and long.  
Do I sense a rumble in the distance?  
I suppose I growl and mutter in my own way...

He, for whom the poets sang,  
He, to whom the psalmists prayed,  
He, about whom the wise pondered,  
He, for whom the Exiles longed—  
Draws near with a weight of glory.  
He, for whom and by whom all things were made—is coming!

I sense the coming of him who defies description  
Whose coming is so weighty it almost makes the earth tremble.  
Creation seems to utter a subliminal groan  
Longing for all the prophets foretold.

Will heaven and earth lose their moorings  
And flee away when he comes?  
Or will the trees of the field clap their hands?  
I get a sense in Advent of an approaching Immensity,  
Something so huge and hard to comprehend—  
And then, I hear the soft cries of a baby in a manger...

## *The Ways to Bethlehem*

*December 2*

## *The Fullness of Time*

*"But when the fullness of the time was come,  
God sent forth his Son, made of a woman..."*

*Galatians 4:4, KJV*

Now Mary and Joseph make this long journey and at the end of it  
no one is ready for them.

They themselves are not ready for his birth.

Mary's labor pains are probably induced  
by the long ride on the back of a donkey,  
the jolting and swaying, the up and down,  
and now at the end of it,

Mary tells Joseph that her time is at hand...  
the fullness of time.

He looks anxiously from house to house,  
this place and that,  
even the caravanserai, the inn, is too crowded  
and there is no room for them.

The little town of Bethlehem is overcrowded by tired visitors,  
come for the census,  
feeling jerked around by the Romans,  
feeling the nuisance, the upheaval,  
and no one has time  
for this weary couple in the fullness of time.

They find (or maybe someone finds for them) a stable,  
perhaps a cave where farm animals are kept.

There in the night, on a pile of straw,  
wishing for better,  
but having to make do with what they have,  
Mary gives way to the contractions  
that will not be delayed or postponed—

the Child will come now and that is all there is to it—  
in the fullness of time.

Mary gives birth in the cold night, in the stable,  
perhaps no longer caring about the squalid surroundings,  
caring only to get it over with.

And Joseph is the anxious and inadequate midwife,  
wondering how in the world things ended up like this.  
And it is the fullness of time.

Again, making do with what they have,  
they take the feeding trough, the manger,  
and use it for a basinet for the Newborn.

His coming seems so accidental,  
so incidental, so random...  
in the fullness of time.

This is the time chosen from the foundation of the world;  
this is just what God imagined  
or foresaw or even planned.

He knew the Good Shepherd  
would come to his sheep as a Lamb.  
While his people were harassed and helpless,  
like sheep without a shepherd,  
then would he come in the fullness of time.

He would take the anxious feeling of being caught short,  
the time when we wonder what to do next,  
this time of embarrassed helplessness,  
the time of being ashamed of panic and poverty  
and transfigure it—  
by coming to dwell with us right here in this time—  
and make it beautiful, make it his time,  
the fullness of time.

December 3

## *Meditation on a Theme from Wesley and St. Paul*

From the great halls of splendor  
He stepped into the night,  
To make himself our mender  
In our pain and in our plight.

He descended from the highest height  
Of joy to know our woes;  
He relinquished all his power to fight  
With weakness all our foes.

The King of kings became a slave  
To know us in our need,  
Quit filling all creation save  
The space within a seed.

His scepter and his staff and rod  
Were laid aside with grace,  
Yet still the glory of our God  
Shone in his human face:

His person, essence, who he is  
(The Hand within the Glove)  
God found in fashion as a Man,  
Emptied of all but Love.

December 4

## He Comes Down from Heaven

*"No one has gone up to heaven  
except the One who came down from heaven,  
the Son of Man who is in heaven..."  
John's Gospel 3:13, Jerusalem Bible*

The early news wends its way...  
The first preaching of the preachers say,  
"The kingdom of heaven is near!  
Heaven's kingdom is here!"

What is it like?  
What is it like—for the One who is in heaven—  
(We could almost say the One who makes heaven—heaven!)  
What is it like for him to come down from heaven?  
And what is more like heaven when he comes down to us?  
Is heaven there or here?  
Where is heaven?  
With the archangels and seraphim?  
Or in the womb of Mary?  
And then with his birth—  
The stable where ox and ass and cattle feed?  
Are the angels leaving heaven  
To sing their song over the hills of Bethlehem?  
Or do they feel as they draw near the place of the Nativity  
That they are coming to heaven—  
To that Holiest Place where he who was with God in the beginning  
And is God—  
Is become flesh and is dwelling among us?

Think of it!  
He who is at the heart of the throne in heaven,  
Angles and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, powers and dominions  
Worshiping and adoring him,  
Hearing melodies and words that we can only dimly guess,  
Songs so beautiful that our hearts would break for wonder  
If we heard them,  
A cataract of praise where he is able to discern  
Every strand of song from every single singer—  
Now plunges himself into utter silence  
Until his nascent bit of embryonic humanity forms ears to hear  
The flow of blood, the swish of fluid, the beating of his mother's heart.

Think of it!  
He who can see everything  
And dwells in the light from which heaven and earth flee away,  
The light to which no one can approach—  
Steps down into the darkness of our beginnings and our wanderings.  
He becomes blind until he opens his eyes as a newborn  
Unable to focus on a new world,  
Lit by a torch or an oil lamp  
Or perhaps only the light of the sinking moon  
That reveals the shapes and shadows of manger and stall,  
The misty breath of the cattle in the stable,  
The nearness of his mother's breast  
And the blurred outlines of her eyes and lips.

Think of it!  
He who inhabits eternity  
And for whom the nations are a drop in the bucket,  
Who fills infinity enough to be everywhere,  
Now confines himself to the growing seed within Mary.  
He who is present in all places at all times,  
Now becomes local and limited,  
Centering himself down into a human baby,  
Once upon a time...