

Poems/Reflections/Prayers for
Advent & Christmas

**Poem: “Into the Darkest
Hour,” Madeleine L’Engle**

It was a time like this,
War & 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 & lust for power,
license & greed and blight –
and yet the Prince of bliss
came into the darkest hour
in quiet & 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.



A Christmas Card –Thomas Merton

*When the white stars talk together
like sisters
And when the winter hills
Raise their grand semblance in the
freezing night,
Somewhere one window
Bleeds like the brown eye of an open
force.*

*Hills, stars,
White stars that stand above the
eastern stable.
Look down and offer Him.
The dim adoring light of your belief.
Whose small Heart bleeds with
infinite fire.*

*Shall not this Child
(When we shall hear the bells of His
amazing voice)
Conquer the winter of our hateful
century?*

*And when His Lady Mother leans
upon the crib,
Lo, with what rapiers
Those two loves fence and flame their
brilliancy!*

*Here in this straw lie planned the
fires
That will melt all our sufferings:
He is our Lamb, our holocaust!*

*And one by one the shepherds, with
their snowy feet,
Stamp and shake out their hats upon
the stable dirt,
And one by one kneel down to look
upon their Life.*

Carol

**Flocks feed by darkness with a noise
of whispers in the dry grass of
pastures,
And lull the solemn night with their
weak bells.
The little towns upon the rocky hills
Look down as meek as children:
Because they have seen come this
holy time.
God's glory, now, is kindled gentler
than low candlelight
Under the rafters of a barn:
Eternal Peace is sleeping in the hay,**

**And Wisdom's born in secret in a
straw-roofed stable.
And O! Make holy music in the
stars, you happy angels.
You shepherds, gather on the hill.
Look up, you timid flocks, where the
three kings
Are coming through the wintry
trees;
While we unnumbered children of
the wicked centuries
Come after with our penances and
prayers,
And lay them down in the sweet-
smelling hay
Beside the wise men's golden jars.**

Thomas Merton

In Mary-Darkness
by Jessica Powers

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 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

Christmas

by Orcadian poet **George Mackay Brown:**

'Toll requiem', said sun to
earth,
As the grass got thin.
The star-wheel went, all nails
and thorns,
Over mill and kirk and inn.
The old sun died.

'Our King will return', said
root to bone,
To the skeleton tree on the
hill.
At midnight, an ox and an ass,
Between lantern and star
Cried, *Gloria...Lux in
tenebris...**
In a wintered byre.

(* Light in darkness).

The widowed earth
Tolled a black bell:

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Excerpt from Advent 1955 by *John Betjeman*

...Some ways indeed are very odd
By which we hail the birth of God.
We raise the price of things in
shops,
We give plain boxes fancy tops
And lines which traders cannot sell
Thus parcell'd go extremely well
We dole out bribes we call a present
To those to whom we must be
pleasant
For business reasons. Our defence
is
These bribes are charged against
expenses
And bring relief in Income Tax
Enough of these unworthy cracks!
'The time draws near the birth of
Christ'.
A present that cannot be priced
Given two thousand years ago
Yet if God had not given so
He still would be a distant stranger
And not the Baby in the manger.

On a more serious note we have his poem on Christmas:

The holly in the windy hedge
And round the Manor House the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that the villagers can say
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare –
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

A Prayer for Christmas Gatherings

In this Christmas season like no other,
even now, O God, your name is worthy to be praised.
For in your mercy and kindness
you sent your Son to be our Saviour.

For the blessings of the Incarnation we have known
and for those we have yet to recognize,
to you we sing our praise.

For life that reminds us how fragile we are and also
how strong we can be: Glory to God in the highest.

For sheltering that is a reminder of
your abiding protection: Glory to God in the highest.

For communication that allows us

to connect in ways new and old: Glory to God in the highest.
And for mindfulness that shows us
how much we rely on one another: Glory to God in the highest.

Watch over your family, Lord, gathered here
and at tables separated by miles,
and bless those who work tirelessly to keep us all safe.
Though we may be kept apart
in this season that calls us together,
we know that your Word dwells among us.

Lord, we ask you to ease the pain of empty chairs
that bring to mind our beloved dead.
Let our grieving find its rest in your Son, Jesus,
in whose Resurrection is our hope.

Grant your Spirit to be present here
that this meal may become a foretaste of your heavenly table
where every tear shall be wiped away, every hunger fed,
and no distance can separate us from your love in Christ
our Saviour, from whom all good things come.

Amen.