

Christmas Voices

Joseph's Christmas Eve

Seems almost Jahveh didn't want us here.
Feet growing sore enough to etch
In slow relief each rock and tree. Could I
Have doubts even now so great they'd stretch

The road like that? or drag us finally here
To where no door will close against
The cold, where (father no father) I've straw for ease
Of pangs—they seize her now!—and scents

Are those of barn and stall? The simple ass
That carried her deserves as much.
What word was that? Only a cry new born
And what a cry! So soon. The touch

Of Mary's breath tonight meant heaven's close.
And now that light above the ridge,
That choir, both softly swelling softly filling
As if with light and sound to bridge

The earth and sky. But look! They come to rest
On Mary's berth, reflecting clear
As though that manger were their source. It is:
The Word himself, Jahveh, lies there.

Christmas: 33 A.D.

He tells me that until he knows again
The splitting bud breaking into olive leaves
All earth will reckon time from that pre-dawn
Dawn when Joseph handed him to me
To dry him and to swaddle.

My soul doth magnify my son

Through three and thirty springs I've known
Renewing warmth: each year of our Lord
A year of my son.
Each year I know his gifts beyond the need
Of gold or frankincense or myrrh.
The warmth has come again
I know: the olive grows new leaves.
But now I shiver.

My soul doth magnify

Follow me, he said, but whither he goes we cannot.
That ass he rode, no bigger than the one that brought us both
To Bethlehem, walked this time on leaves of palm
And flowered wreaths. But thorns were somewhere
There. He knows as we can never know
The measure of his creation.
My soul contracts like drying olive leaves.

My soul doth magnify

I saw him born of me, of water and of fire.
I feel again the pangs like hammer blows
Intenser now than ever at his birth.
Oh, what is being born
Of thorns and cross and blood from pores?
He's now I know at Gethsemane
And people talk of crucify.
He told his twelve the Son of man—my son—
Is betrayed to be crucified.

My soul doth magnify

“A sword shall pierce thy soul.”
The pangs bring darkness to the earth
Yet something warms their very source.
What was it Nicodemus heard another night?
Who believes in him shall not perish, but have
Life. The pangs redouble and now I know
They'll stop not even with his death.
But they must mean—yes now I know they mean—
Eternal life is being born.

My soul doth magnify the Lord: my son.

Christmas: 33 A.D.—II

Ah, where is my power now, my glory, my majesty?

Restrained here with all space open to me, but caught
With all my longings focused down on Him.
My light passes through a prism
Too dark tonight for any rainbow gleam.

Where I am is Heaven, but Heaven tonight
Is Hell. I felt it then—and knew I'd feel it now—
When morning stars together sang
And all my children shouted for joy of our coming
Creation: Mine the spirit moving upon the waters,
Theirs the coupling of flesh to spirit.
Felt it when he said, “Send me.”

Felt it again in all the joy of breathing
Spirit into dust of earth. And felt it when all
Around me rang those alleluias at His birth
(I knew this night must be). They'll ring again.
But now the hammers ring in hollow tones that make
Him sure. His blood pours where mine cannot.
And I can only stand and wait.

And Mary, Mother of my Son, my one begotten Son,
How those blows and blood descend on her.
No light can touch her now.
And none goes out from me.

One eyelash twitch—and all
Would change, the pain evaporate in floods of light,
That soldier with the spear forevermore
Transfixed. How can my eyelash stand the strain?

But no. That they be free my eye stays bare.
Tonight I forsake Him. He hangs
Alone.

And I remain alone—no beam from me can bear
My love to Him. And all His pain thrusts up
Into my heart.

“Finished!” The travail of earth has ended.
The relief comes sharper and heavier than the pain.
I live with Him below it all. A thousand years
A day to God? This day and night I wait
A thousand years.

But look! The rainbow light breaks through.
His prison stone refracts His light—
My son reborn to me.
He brings my power and glory and majesty with Him:
He brings my children home.

The Alleluias are my own.

—Marden J. Clark

Marden J. Clark, a retired English professor from Brigham Young University, received the Association for Mormon Letters poetry award for his book of poetry *Moods: Of Late*.