

All souls

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour."

A sense of anticipation, wonder and profound trust is evident in the Song of Mary and in the songs of so many of us through time as we long for God to show Godself .

In our unexpected encounters with the stranger and the outsider, in our awe at creation, in the mystery of the sacraments, in our dreams, in those unexpected moments of insight, surely there is also an advent? A coming of mystery, of understanding?

I have worked with Rev'd Dr Warren Huffa to create poems from his blog. In much of his work, there is a sense of anticipation and of God breaking through into our lives.

Here's an example:

### **From Thin Experiences**

transcendence breaks through,  
The bond between us, human compassion  
and love are thin places.

Mystery is everywhere  
once we have our eyes opened.  
You could think of the virgin birth  
as another way of saying  
that mystery came among us,  
that the mystery surrounding us,  
that is deep within reality, came  
to fruition in the womb of Mary."

Mystery came among us and Christ comes to us. Again and again bringing us hope and paradox, stillness and disquiet in the outworkings of our faith. We are always in a state of anticipation , always in advent.

In narratives about the nativity that were read to us as children, we heard strange talk of a special visit to Mary, a long uncomfortable journey, Shepherds, angels, an unexpected star or did some know what it meant? We heard of Mary and Joseph, a long uncomfortable journey , seemingly untroubled by ending up in an animal stall. Strangers gathered, gazed, wondered at The King-child in the manger. Whose King?

As children, we stepped with them into mystery. Anything was possible. My cat would have liked it there. We were caught up in the moment. Wonder lifted us, and although our comprehension of its full meaning was suspended, we saw that love made room for all. And when they had seen the baby, they all left to tell what they had seen and heard.

Malcolm Guite, a Cambridge poet, writes that *“What the poet does, is take the fleeting apprehension, that glance of heaven, and finds, makes, forms a living body for it and that brings it for us into the world of comprehension.”*

In his poem, *Hope*, Philip Booth expresses a similar idea.

Old spirit, in and beyond me,  
keep and extend me. Amid strangers  
friends, great trees and big seas breaking,  
let love move me. Let me hear the whole music,  
see clear, reach deep. Open me to find due words,  
that I may shape them to ploughshares of my own making.”

The idea of seeing clear, reaching deep and finding ‘due words’ echoes the message of today’s Gospel reading.

John sends disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” **4** Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see”.

I’ve tried to capture that in a poem:

### **Are You the One?**

John waits behind stone walls,  
Sends messengers to Jesus -  
*Are you the one who is to come,  
or are we to wait for another?*

The answer comes in life breaking open:

*Go and tell what you hear and see*  
the poor behold the good news  
the lame walk, the blind see.

*Go and tell what you hear and see*  
Fill hearts with hope  
through quiet deeds, whispers of grace  
light that darkness cannot quench.

*Are you the one?*  
*Go and tell what you hear and see*

“Go and tell what you hear and see.” This I believe, is the work of the poet: to take fleeting apprehension and find a voice for it. A new becoming. A fleshing out with words. Being a poet is a particular form of witness, but it is the work of all disciples to find their own words to show and tell what they hear and see.

This call to make known Christ’s coming and presence in the world involves prayerfully seeking the things beyond, within and around us, present and past, and in all appearances.

*In his poem Mythopoeia, Tolkien wrote of mankind as sub-creator of God’s light. He uses the image of a prism.*

“man, sub-creator, the refracted light  
through whom is splintered from a single White  
to many hues, and endlessly combined  
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.”

The sense of life being broken open, refracted and passed on through the telling, looks back to prophecy, names the present, and anticipates the future.

Between this beginning in Bethlehem and Christ’s second coming, there are many other advents. ‘Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age,’ says Jesus. Through those paradoxes of past and future, dark and light, waiting and consolation, emptiness and fulfilment. *Go and tell what you hear and see, says Jesus.*

Isaiah 51:16 reminds us of God as the source of radiance and wisdom

*“I have put my words in your mouth  
and covered you with the shadow of my hand—  
I who set the heavens in place,  
who laid the foundations of the earth.”*

Advent poetry, especially, lives in the waiting now, and leans forward to fulfilment, through chronological time and sacred time.

*Go and tell what you hear and see, says Jesus.*

*As Christian listeners, composers, readers, poets and writers, there are matters we have been “charged with”. Go and tell what you hear and see.*

In this season of Advent, let us encourage one another in, as Warren Huffa writes,

“Way(s) of saying that mystery came among us,  
that the mystery surrounding us,  
that is deep within reality, came

*to fruition in the womb of Mary.”*

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