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## Advent I Am

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# Advent I Am

LEE MAGNESS

*This Christmas reading connects the advent of Jesus with the identity of Jesus.*

*L = leader or liturgist, the reader of the scripture texts; R = reader, the reader of the poetic reflection;*

*C = the chorus of readers or congregation.*

- L *Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. (Luke 2:4)*
- R Joseph went to Judea  
The place of power  
Lair of kings and conquerors  
Site of tower and temple  
The carpenter had come to a place  
Of procurators and priests when he
- L *went from the town of Nazareth ... to Judea*
- R Joseph and Mary murmured in amazement  
and it sounded for all the world like
- C ***Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah***
- L *Joseph ... went from the town of Nazareth to Judea ... to the city of David called Bethlehem*
- R Bethlehem slept in Jerusalem's shadow  
A town of dusty streets and stalls  
A town of dozing sheep and shepherds  
Far from privilege and power  
The peasants had come to a village of peasants  
But a king had once called it home, this
- L *city of David called Bethlehem*
- R The little village wondered at the woman great with child  
and it sounded for all the world like
- C ***Can this be the son of David?***
- L *He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. (Luke 2:5)*
- R They went and a long going it was  
Laborious and long  
Full of false starts and frequent stops  
Longer for her than for him  
Few knew the pain of each plodding step  
The fellow pilgrims could only pity when
- L *he went ... with Mary*
- R The heart of the bouncing baby beat strong  
and it sounded for all the world like
- C ***I am the way***
- L *He went...with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child*
- R Engaged and expecting

- Betrothed and pregnant  
 Unmarried and with child  
 There was no good way to say it  
 Would the shame have outweighed the son?  
 No, nothing could have countered the fact that she
- L           *was expecting a child*  
 R   The baby borne in shame would have answered the whispers  
       and it would have sounded for all the world like
- C           ***I am the son of God***
- L   *While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. (Luke 2:6)*  
 R   Micah had mentioned it  
       This while-they-were-there there  
       this not-the-least Bethlehem  
       Where place and time converged  
       It was time for God to send a son  
       Through a real person, in a real place, s
- L           *while they were there, the time came*  
 R   If the people of this place and time had noticed  
       they would have known that
- C           ***the fullness of time had come***
- L   *And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because  
       there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)*  
 R   It was a first birth and long  
       It was a first birth and hard  
       One to be sweated through,  
       Strained through, screamed through  
       There was no mother or midwife  
       Her husband was no help when
- L           *she gave birth to her first-born son*  
 R   The child could only cry long and hard  
       and it sounded for all the world like
- C           ***I am the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead***
- L   *She gave birth to her first-born son...and laid him in a manger*  
 R   It would at least be warm  
       It would at least be dry  
       It would be somewhat safe  
       There where animals ate  
       Her husband might have complained  
       The innkeeper could have cared less that
- L           *she laid him in a manger*  
 R   But the child could only coo safe and warm  
       and it sounded for all the world like
- C           ***I am the bread of life***
- L   *In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. (Luke 2:8)*  
 R   They were used to the far fields  
       They were used to starry nights  
       They were used to the half sleep

They were used to the sheep  
 But angels were a different matter  
 And news of a Savior settled strangely on the

L *shepherds living in the fields*

R The child could only cry far into the starry night  
 and it sounded for all the world like

C ***I am the good shepherd***

L *There were shepherds living in the fields ... keeping watch over their flocks by night*

R The sheep had been silent to the night

To the glory, the shining, the angels

They were oblivious to the event

To the fear and joy, the coming and going

They would be silent before their shearers

As they were with their shepherds no longer

L *keeping watch over their flocks by night*

R So the lonely sheep could only bleat  
 and it sounded for all the world like

C ***Behold the lamb of God***

L *And an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*  
 (Luke 2:9)

R Even the dimmest star glimmers bright

On a late pasture land night

Even the days had been dark lately

But now God-glory glowed

The farmers were flooded out

And filled with angel awe when

L *the glory of the Lord shone around them*

R The just-born baby gurgled his barn bed

and it sounded for all the world like

C ***I am the light of the world***

L *So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. (Luke 2:16)*

R The stall was still there

When they eventually arrived

The manger was there and the mother

And the for-all-intents-and-purposes father

But the object of the information

The thing found though never lost was

L *the child lying in the manger*

R The child sighed at their wild wonder

and it sounded for all the world like

C ***I am***

L *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.*  
 (Luke 2:20)

R It had been a time for telling

A night for exclamation, for proclamation

They had seen what they had been told

Now they told what they had seen

It was a night for news

- L For telling God praise and others  
*all they had heard and seen*  
 R The child chuckled at the suddenly talkative shepherds  
 and it sounded for all the world like  
 C ***I am the truth***
- L *In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem.... (Matt 2:1)*  
 R Ruled by Rome, he ruled for Rome,  
 He married Mariamne, daughter of Judah  
 He gave them fortresses, aqueducts, a Temple  
 He gave them fear, made them what he was—paranoid  
 It was a time of terror and turmoil  
 It was an age of oppression when he was born  
 L *in the time of King Herod*  
 R The bent-back peasants padded past the house and muttered  
 and it sounded for all the world like  
 C ***Are you the King of the Jews?***
- L *In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,  
 Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising. (Matt 2:1-2)*  
 R They studied the stars  
 They studied the scriptures  
 They knew the nations  
 And heard history happening  
 Judah was on the rise  
 Those wise men from the edge of dawn  
 L *observed his star at its rising*  
 R The baby babbled at their starry eyes  
 and it sounded for all the world like  
 C ***I am the bright and morning star***
- L *When they had heard the king, they set out; and there ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising,  
 until it stopped over the place where the child was ... On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary, his  
 mother; and they knelt down and worshipped him. (Matt 2:9, 11a)*  
 R Micah had mentioned the Messiah  
 But Bethlehem? Bethlehem?  
 Where the scriptures sent they went  
 Where the star stopped they stopped  
 The sages were stunned to silence  
 There in that humble house  
 L *and they knelt and worshipped him*  
 R But the cosmos careened around them  
 and it sounded for all the world like  
 C ***Jesus is Lord***
- L *Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matt 2:11b)*  
 R They had reached their goal  
 They had received their gift  
 The gift of the journey's end  
 The delight of destination  
 But they broke their reverie long enough

- To remember the well-packed presents—
- L           *they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh*
- R   The gold twinkled in his eyes and tinkled in his fingers  
and it sounded for all the world like
- C           *you were ransomed not with perishable things like silver and gold*
- L   *When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was furious, and he sent and killed all the children  
in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under.... (Matt 2:16)*
- R   While the soldiers slaughtered the infant sons  
Joseph shouldered his infant son  
And they edged toward Egypt  
The magi had made it home  
But the brilliance was gone from Bethlehem  
Only swords flashed now as they
- L           *killed all the children in and around Bethlehem*
- R   The child looked back with longing and lamented  
and it sounded for all the world like
- C           *the Son of man must be killed*
- R   He came amidst questions
- C    *Are you the King of the Jews?  
Can this be the son of David?*
- R   He asserted his identity
- C    *I am  
I am the way  
I am the truth  
I am the life  
I am the light of the world  
I am the bright and morning star  
I am the bread of life  
I am the good shepherd  
I am the son of God  
I am the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead  
I am*
- R   They foresaw his fate
- C    *The fullness of time had come  
Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah  
Behold the lamb of God  
The Son of man must be killed  
You were ransomed not with perishable things like silver and gold*
- R   We confess his coming
- C    *Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is Lord*

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