Advent I Am

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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
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

was expecting a child

The baby borne in shame would have answered the whispers
and it would have sounded for all the world like

I am the son of God

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. (Luke 2:6)

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
while they were there, the time came

If the people of this place and time had noticed
they would have known that

the fullness of time had come

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)

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

she gave birth to her first-born son

The child could only cry long and hard
and it sounded for all the world like

I am the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead

She gave birth to her first-born son...and laid him in a manger

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

she laid him in a manger

But the child could only coo safe and warm
and it sounded for all the world like

I am the bread of life

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. (Luke 2:8)

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
  shepherds living in the fields
The child could only cry far into the starry night
  and it sounded for all the world like
  I am the good shepherd

There were shepherds living in the fields ... keeping watch over their flocks by night
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
  keeping watch over their flocks by night
So the lonely sheep could only bleat
  and it sounded for all the world like
  Behold the lamb of God

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)
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
  the glory of the Lord shone around them
The just-born baby gurgled his barn bed
  and it sounded for all the world like
  I am the light of the world

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. (Luke 2:16)
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
  the child lying in the manger
The child sighed at their wild wonder
  and it sounded for all the world like
  I am

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
(Luke 2:20)
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
For telling God praise and others
all they had heard and seen
The child chuckled at the suddenly talkative shepherds
and it sounded for all the world like
I am the truth

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem..., (Matt 2:1)
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 turmoi
It was an age of oppression when he was born
in the time of King Herod
The bent-back peasants padded past the house and muttered
and it sounded for all the world like
Are you the King of the Jews?

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)
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
observed his star at its rising
The baby babbled at their starry eyes
and it sounded for all the world like
I am the bright and morning star

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)
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
and they knelt and worshipped him
But the cosmos careened around them
and it sounded for all the world like
Jesus is Lord

Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matt 2:11b)
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—

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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