

**“With the Eyes of your Heart Enlightened...” Ephesians 1:18a**

***A Celebration of Christmastide in Poetry***

Second Sunday after Christmas 3 January 2021

**Moonless Darkness**

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

*Read by Frances Chamberlain*

Moonless darkness stands between.  
Past, the Past, no more be seen!  
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me  
To the sight of Him Who freed me  
From the self that I have been.  
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;  
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly.  
Now beginning, and alway:  
Now begin, on Christmas day.

**Breath\***

by Luci Shaw

*Read by Brad Schide*

When in the cavern darkness, the child  
first opened his mouth (even before  
his eyes widened to see the supple world  
his lungs had breathed into being),  
could he have known that breathing  
trumps seeing? Did he love the way air sighs  
as it brushes in and out through flesh  
to sustain the tiny heart's iambic beating,  
tramping the crossroads of the brain  
like donkey tracks, the blood dazzling and  
invisible, the corpuscles skittering to the earlobes  
and toenails? Did he have any idea it  
would take all his breath to speak in stories  
that would change the world?

(\*There is another poem of this title by this poet; consider looking it up as well.)

## **Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem**

by Maya Angelou

*Read by Marisa Esposito*

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes  
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.  
Flood waters await us in our avenues

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche  
Over unprotected villages.  
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves. What have we done to so affront nature?  
We worry God.  
Are you there? Are you really there?  
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas enters.  
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope  
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright air.  
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,  
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.  
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in the corner.  
Flood waters recede into memory.  
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us  
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children.  
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into their sunsets.  
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things.  
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.  
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.  
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.  
We hear a sweetness.  
The word is Peace.  
It is loud now. It is louder.  
Louder than the explosion of bombs.

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We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.  
It is what we have hungered for.  
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.  
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.  
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.  
We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.  
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say come.  
Peace.  
Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.  
We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian,  
Implore you, to stay a while with us.  
So we may learn by your shimmering light  
How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmastime, a halting of hate time.

On this platform of peace, we can create a language  
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ  
Into the great religions of the world.  
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.  
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.  
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices  
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and Non-Believers,  
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.  
Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.  
Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves  
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.  
Peace, My Sister.  
Peace, My Soul.

**Almighty God, Are You True***Read by Brian Sahlin*by Frederick Buechner (excerpt from The Clown in the Belfry)

“Almighty God, are you true?”

When you are standing up to your neck in darkness,  
how do you say yes to that question?

You say yes, I suppose, the only way faith can ever say it,  
if it is honest with itself.

You say yes with your fingers crossed.

You say it with your heart in your mouth.

Maybe that way we can say yes.

He visited us.

The world has never been quite the same.

It is still a very dark world,  
in some ways darker than ever before,  
but the darkness is different  
because he keeps getting born into it.

**Candles for Christmas***Read by Frances Chamberlain*

by Howard Thurman

I will light candles this Christmas:  
Candles of joy despite all sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all the year long.

**At the End of the Year, A Blessing***Read by Brian Sahlin*

by John O'Donohue

The particular mind of the ocean  
Filling the coastline's longing  
With such brief harvest  
Of elegant, vanishing waves

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Is like the mind of time  
Opening us shapes of days.

As this year draws to its end,  
We give thanks for the gifts it brought  
and how they became inlaid within  
Where neither time nor tide can touch them.

The days when the veil lifted  
And the soul could see delight;  
When a quiver caressed the heart  
In the sheer exuberance of being here.

Surprises that came awake  
In forgotten corners of old fields  
Where expectation seemed to have quenched.

The slow, brooding times  
When all was awkward  
And the wave in the mind  
Pierced every sore with salt.

The darkened days which stopped  
The confidence of the dawn.

Days when beloved faces shone brighter  
With light from beyond themselves;  
And from the granite of some secret sorrow  
A stream of buried tears loosened.

We bless this year for all we learned,  
For all we loved and lost  
And the quiet way it brought us  
Nearer to our invisible destination.