

## Christmas Eve 2017

Almost all who(m) we know like Christmas a lot.  
But Joseph, who lived just north of Jerusalem, did not.  
The guy wasn't sold on this whole Christmas season,  
and I'd say he had some pretty good reasons.  
It could be, perhaps, his taxes would jump.  
It could be forced travel to Bethlehem, the old dump.  
But I think the most likely reason, no maybes,  
was his fiancée was soon expecting a baby,  
which came with the added perplexitive bother  
that a messenger said he wasn't really the father.

So, whatever the reason, the trip or the tot,  
helpless old Joseph knew he disliked it a lot.  
He growled to himself, carpenter fingers drumming,  
wishing he could stop all that bad news from coming.  
"Life is pretty hopeless," he snarled with a sneer.  
"There's not much I could do, it's quite crystal clear."

The dread fate grew closer, hour by hour,  
the pressures of violence, of money, and power.  
And the more Joseph thought of the terrible stresses,  
life seemed to slip further away from successes.  
And the more that he thought, with his furrowed brow,  
the more he was distraught at what he put up with now.

But this wasn't the time for grinchily moping about  
since he had strict orders from one with huge clout.  
Whether he felt a grump or people-pleaser,  
Joseph had been commanded by Augustus Caesar  
to make himself known and register with the empire  
as demanded by a government filled with old liars.

He had to get his donkey in gear and start the long journey  
to go and report to the district attorney.  
So he gathered their bags and young rotund Mary  
on a ramshackle mule, though still feeling contrary.  
Curmudgeonly Joseph started them down  
to Bethlehem, his ancestors' sleepy small town.  
When they arrived, it was dark. Quiet snow filled the air.  
Behind the warm windows, they felt no one would care.  
Then they came to the first little house on the square.

"This is stop number one," the step-papa said,  
as he slunk nervously and began creeping ahead.  
With humble politeness, he tapped on the door  
but was disheartened when he thought like before  
that kindness was rare; no one was a neighbor.  
Hard times had stifled most generous behavior,  
leaving all feeling they were lost and were least.

Hope was dim on this night not fitting man nor beast.  
Yet! the door cracked ajar with a breath of warm air.  
Joseph curtseyed and asked, "Please, ma'am, would you dare,  
to allow us inside? We just need to sleep.  
My pregnant fiancée and I won't make a peep.  
We'll be unintrusive, as quiet as mice."  
Her answer was the same as at many more houses,  
with refusals, "We can't. I'm sorry. No room."  
The light disappeared, leaving Joseph in gloom.  
Though he kept knocking, persistently begging and bummin',  
nobody could make space to allow them to come in.  
Joseph wasn't surprised. He thought it might be the case  
that people were feeling too worn out to embrace  
some strangers in need and smelling most unpleasant  
when they'd prefer to feast and open their presents.  
Some doors wouldn't open, because folks were busy,  
on errands and tasks and worked into a tizzy  
as they pursued the happy seasonal distractions,  
with shopping and parties, cookies and snacks, 'n  
others felt stuck in distress, and so hunkered down  
to guard their own interests in their own small town.  
"Life isn't easy," Joseph muttered in his beard,  
"when there's so much uncertain, so much to be feared."  
So they knocked and they knocked and they knocked!  
Knocked! Knocked! Knocked!  
But every door that they came to was shut up and locked.  
As he was scheming if by creeping very nimbly  
he could sneak them down in through a chimney,  
well, that's when young Mary got a sensation, an awful sensation.  
She got a wonderful, awful sensation.  
With no thought left for tough problems of society  
Joseph knew it was urgent to find someplace quiet, he  
guided his fiancée and dearly he held her  
and gave up on knocking and searching for shelter  
gave up on the houses and all of the people,  
gave up on the holy folks under the steeple,  
gave up on kindness and sympathy from strangers,  
gave up on police to protect them from danger,  
gave up on the inns, hostels, and hospitals,  
gave on the beds and simply forgot it all.  
He rushed them in to the back of a barn.  
She labored until a small baby was born.  
(Don't like the barn/born rhyme from this alleged St. Nick?  
Then write your own, if you're so smart and so slick.)  
They swaddled the baby to lay in the hay  
trying to keep the cold and livestock far enough away.

Though tiny Jesus was poor, so greatly deprived,  
still it was a relief that he was safe and alive.  
But before Joseph breathed that sigh of relief,  
again he was overcome in his disbelief,  
at the struggles of life and feeling depressed,  
at how all of existence was such a sad mess,  
and he was stuck with the lingering frustration  
at bringing new life into that disgusted nation  
where any hint of improvement seemed awfully bleak  
in the grind to make it through, week after week.  
Yes, for poor Joseph, hope seemed far distant  
as Mary cradled and nursed her newborn infant.

But then he heard a sound, coming over the snow.  
It started out low, then it started to grow.  
And Joseph cupped a rough hand to his ear,  
and strained: what was that sound he could hear?  
To guess, it sounded like an angels' tune  
coming drifting in from under the moon.  
Joseph's spirit lifted and so did his eyes  
at this song, a delightful and shocking surprise.  
This didn't sound sad. It sounded merry.  
It couldn't be so! But it did sound merry. Very!  
Yet while this sound sounded glad,  
it was not quite angelic—a little more bad.

And then his wondering eyes saw the sight  
of some figures drifting in through the night.  
The not-heavenly earthy chorus Jo-seph' heard  
came from a band of dirty, vulgar shepherds.  
They stumbled right into the maternity barn,  
giving the mother some fright and alarm.  
As she pondered what the strange sight meant  
they shouted out in great excitement,  
“We bring tidings from God of great joy  
at the arrival of this here little boy!”  
They hollered and cheered disrupting his snooze  
while passing around a flask of celebrative booze.  
Then, gone in a flash, and just as crazy,  
they went into town, singing and praising.

As they left, Joseph had a big beaming smile  
beaming-er than any in quite a while!  
He puzzled and puzzled 'til his puzzler was sore,  
and Joseph thought of something he hadn't before.  
Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store—  
maybe the answer, perhaps, means...not more  
but Less!

The spirit, the season, life isn't assessed like usual success.

The good news came without ribbons. It came without tags.  
It came without packages, boxes or bags—  
Well, that much you probably already knew.  
But Joseph realized something simpler was true:  
the start of changes, the hope of all earth  
arrived in a lonely barn through this lowly birth.  
The heart of God's blessing, packaged in Jesus  
who comes to love and save and free us.

So it's not in how you ensure your security.  
It's sure not in chasing holy-seeming purity.  
Neither is it in tallying what you've done  
or in how you find diversions for fun.  
It's not in how well you extend season's greetings,  
how well you sing, or the people you're meeting.  
It's not in the hunt to keep yourself happy  
or what you put inside of bright wrapping.  
It's not measured by all that you've gotten,  
but is just because life gets downtrodden.

The truth is, it's nothing more th'n  
that God's favor comes to you as he's born.  
You are always in his grasp, and his aid'll  
hold you closely, just as he was cradled.  
That's no quick fix or instant solution,  
it's not that saying BooHoo's done.  
So Joseph began to trust, with no maybes,  
that goodness was born to share with this baby.  
As Mary's heart grew, we, too, can treasure and nurse  
the hope that saves us from whatever curse.  
Like inbound outcast shepherds we can be shout-y  
with rejoicing that even gets a little rowdy.  
On Christmas, we can really celebrate.  
With that, I'll stop, since it's getting late.