

Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart

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Living Legacy

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Our December issue of Heart to Heart focuses on some of our Advent/Christmas Gospel figures. However, instead of choosing the prominent figures of John the Baptist, Mary, Joseph, etc., we have chosen to reflect on those more in the background, less in the limelight: the innkeeper, the shepherds, the Holy Innocents and their mothers, and the aged Simeon and Anna. Thank you to those who have shared these reflections with us! We pray for Advent and Christmas blessings to all of our readers!

The Innkeeper

The Innkeeper probably felt he had seen it all during the time of the census. But the couple who just showed up at his door were the icing on the cake: a woman so large with child and a man so fraught with anguish and worry that the innkeeper couldn't just say "no" to them. They seemed relieved when he offered them the stable/cave, and at no cost. And they both seemed to appreciate the pitchers of hot water and warm milk he brought them before he gathered in his animals for the night. The animals' bodies would help Mary and Joseph stay warm in the cave. The donkey, sheep, goat and cow seemed to sense these people meant them no harm.

Whenever we welcome a stranger, we welcome Christ. No matter who we welcome or how, we perform a *mitzvah* (a good deed done by a pious Jew as fulfillment of the Law or because God expected it). We entertain and take care of Jesus who greets us in turn. Think of the plight of refugees and immigrants in our day. So many are in trouble through no fault of their own. They simply believe in the text of Emma Lazarus on the Statue of Liberty:

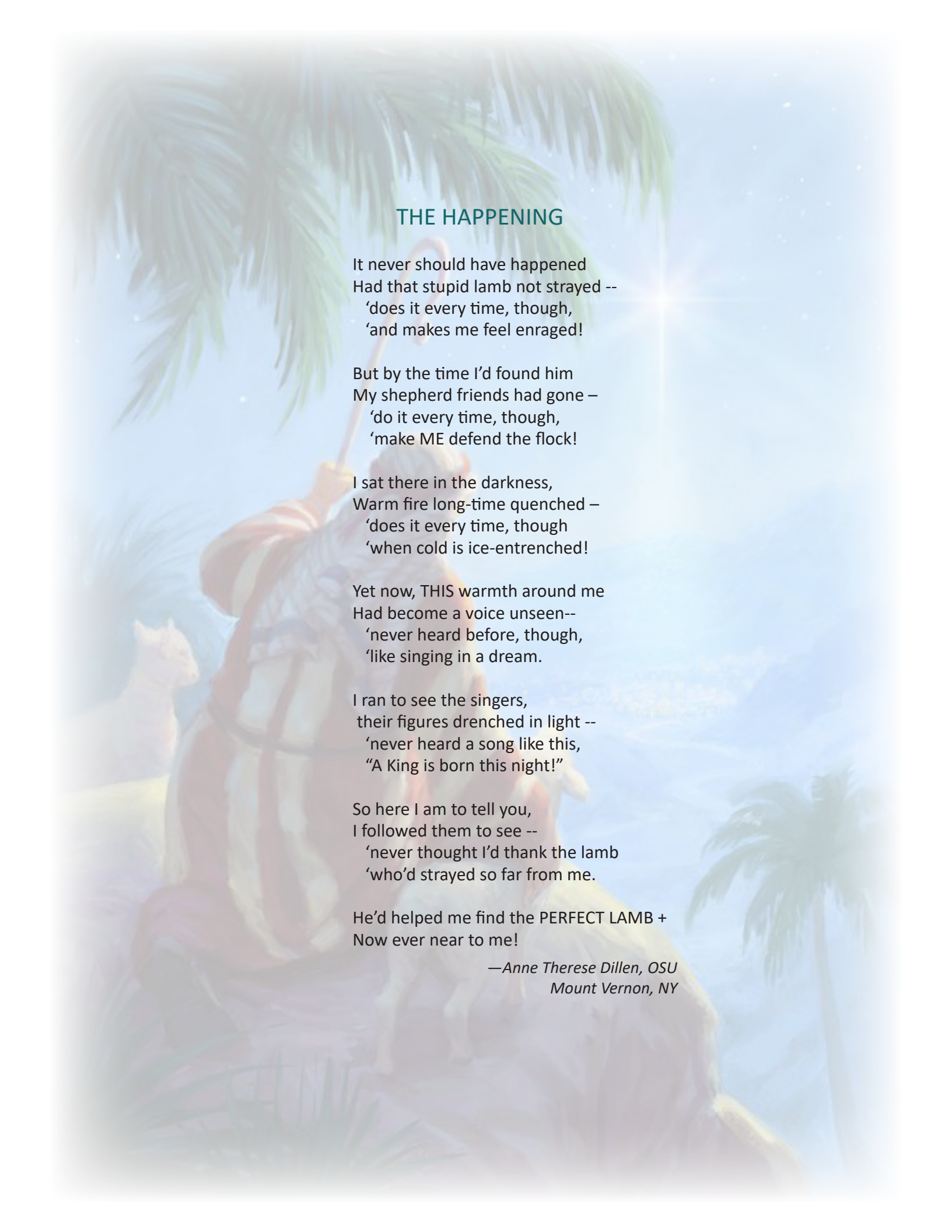
"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breath free.
Send those, the tempest-tossed to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

In our day, immigrants, strangers, people from foreign lands are seen by some as a threat to our welfare simply because they are needy and in trouble. They lack security and may look to us to provide some semblance of belonging or welcome to our well-established lifestyle. To volunteer at a "welcome" meeting for some refugees, to see that they are connected with those who know immigration law in our country under the present administration, to help them find an interpreter, to write to our congressmen and women to get unfair laws changed, to help, not hurt, those who are in crisis already – all this is a *mitzvah*. After all, almost 98% of us have had refugees and immigrants who came to the United States at some point in our own family histories.

In our own neighborhoods, in our churches, and in our own towns, we can find ways to be the innkeeper for others, but especially for those who seem desperate, hopeless, and so in need of assistance.

—Sue Anne Cole, OSU
St. Louis, MO





THE HAPPENING

It never should have happened
Had that stupid lamb not strayed --
 'does it every time, though,
 'and makes me feel enraged!

But by the time I'd found him
My shepherd friends had gone --
 'do it every time, though,
 'make ME defend the flock!

I sat there in the darkness,
Warm fire long-time quenched --
 'does it every time, though
 'when cold is ice-entrenched!

Yet now, THIS warmth around me
Had become a voice unseen--
 'never heard before, though,
 'like singing in a dream.

I ran to see the singers,
their figures drenched in light --
 'never heard a song like this,
 "A King is born this night!"

So here I am to tell you,
I followed them to see --
 'never thought I'd thank the lamb
 'who'd strayed so far from me.

He'd helped me find the PERFECT LAMB +
Now ever near to me!

—Anne Therese Dillen, OSU
Mount Vernon, NY

The Holy Innocents Our Call to Serve

*"A voice was heard in Ramah,
sobbing and loud lamentation.
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she would not be consoled,
since they were no more." (Mt 2:18)*

Today, in places of suffering—Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, and even on the streets of our own cities—we encounter echoes of Bethlehem. The world Jesus entered was marked by fear and violence, ruled by those who clung to power at any cost. That same spirit of jealousy and domination persists in our time, leading to acts of dehumanization and destruction.

What does this call us to consider during Advent/Christmas time? How do we recognize goodness when humanity seems bent on tearing itself apart? The story of the Holy Innocents reminds us that even in the midst of grief and injustice, God's redemption breaks through. Jesus was born into such a world, and His life transforms ours.

Herod's cruelty was not the end of the story. For those who lost their children, this tragedy may have marked a beginning—a breaking open of hearts that drew communities together. I imagine mothers gathering in the

temple court, seeking healing and strength, their prayers for justice rising like incense and stirring hope into action.

This image speaks to the creative power of women today when injustice strikes. We see it in border communities offering care to migrants seeking refuge, in neighbors filling food pantries when benefits are cut, and in teachers pouring love into classrooms despite the dismantling of public education. These acts of courage and compassion mirror the resilience born from heartbreak.

So, what can we learn from the Holy Innocents? A heart broken and filled with Christ's love holds divine power. This Advent/Christmas, may we allow our hearts to be stretched wide—so full of Jesus' love that they break open into hope, healing, and justice for the world.

—Jane Cruthirds
Louisville, KY



Simeon and Anna . . . Enduring with Hope

Just eight days after his birth, Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the temple in accordance with Jewish law. When the family entered the temple, they were greeted immediately by two elderly people: Simeon and Anna.

Described as being led by the Holy Spirit, Simeon scoops Jesus out of the arms of His parents and into his own. Mary and Joseph, accustomed to wondrous happenings, suppress their astonishment long enough for Simeon to offer a prophecy. After a lifetime of waiting in the shadows of the temple for God's promised salvation, Simeon blesses God. His hope in the Messiah has been fulfilled, not by witnessing a political coup or taking part in military action against the reigning Roman Empire, but by simply holding an infant and realizing hope for the future within His divinity.

After Simeon's prophecy, Anna emerges. In just three short verses, she is described as a prophetess who fasted

often. Widowed at a young age, Anna could have fallen into deep sadness by her reduced status in society, but instead, she quietly devotes herself to serve her faith community for decades. Like Simeon, Anna has been waiting on the margins for the redemption of her people and does not despair. She is a woman full of hope and purpose.

While Simeon and Anna's long lives of hope in God's promise of a Messiah and service to their community might have felt like an interminable season of waiting, in fact, they were the first to understand and fully proclaim the Good News. During this Advent/Christmas, let us wait with the confidence of Simeon and Anna, ready to welcome the Christ child, and the new beginnings that He offers to each of us, with abundant joy and praise.

—Mary-Kate Tracy
Dedham, MA