



The Nativity by Giotto di Bondone (c.1266-1337) Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padua, Italy

CHRIST MASS 2025

The Turn of the Tide by C.S. Lewis

Breathless was the air over Bethlehem; black and bare
The fields; hard as granite were the clods;
Hedges stiff with ice; the sedge, in the vice
Of the ponds, like little iron rods.
The deathly stillness spread from Bethlehem; it was shed
Wider each moment on the land;
Through rampart and wall into camp and into hall
Stole the hush. All tongues were at a stand.
Travellers at their beer in taverns turned to hear
The landlord—that oracle was dumb;
At the Procurator’s feast a jocular freedman ceased
His story, and gaped; all were glum.
Then the silence flowed forth to the islands and the north
And it smoothed the unquiet river-bars,
And leveled out the waves from their revelling, and paved
The sea with the cold, reflected stars.
Where the Cæsar sat and signed at ease on Palatine,
Without anger, the signatures of death,
There stole into his room and on his soul a gloom,
Till he paused in his work and held his breath.
Then to Carthage and the Gauls, to Parthia and the Falls
Of Nile, to Mount Amara it crept;
The romp and rage of beasts in swamp and forest ceased,
The jungle grew still as if it slept.
So it ran about the girth of the planet. From the Earth
The signal, the warning, went out,
Away beyond the air; her neighbours were aware
Of change, they were troubled with doubt.

Salamanders in the Sun who brandish as they run
Tails like the Americas in size,
Were stunned by it and dazed; wondering, they gazed
Up at Earth, misgiving in their eyes.
In Houses and Signs the Ousiarchs divine
Grew pale and questioned what it meant;
Great Galactic lords stood back to back with swords
Half-drawn, awaiting the event,
And a whisper among them passed, “Is this perhaps the last
Of our story and the glories of our crown?—
The entropy worked out?—the central redoubt
Abandoned?—The world-spring running down?”
Then they could speak no more. Weakness overbore
Even them; they were as flies in a web,
In lethargy stone-dumb. The death had almost come,
And the tide lay motionless at ebb.

Like a stab at that moment over Crab and Bowman,
Over Maiden and Lion, came the shock
Of returning life, the start, and burning pang at heart,
Setting galaxies to tingle and rock.
The Lords dared to breathe, swords went into sheathes
A rustling, a relaxing began;
With rumour and noise of the resuming of joys
Along the nerves of the universe it ran.
Then, pulsing into space with delicate dulcet pace,
Came a music infinitely small,
But clear; and it swelled and drew nearer, till it held
All worlds with the sharpness of its call,

And now divinely deep, ever louder, with a leap
And quiver of inebriating sound,
The vibrant dithyramb shook Libra and the Ram,
The brains of Aquarius spun round—
Such a note as neither Throne nor Potentate had known
Since the Word created the abyss.
But this time it was changed in a mystery, estranged,
A paradox, an ambiguous bliss.

Heaven danced to it and burned; such answer was returned
To the hush, the Favete, the fear
That Earth had sent out. Revel, mirth and shout
Descended to her, sphere below sphere,
Till Saturn laughed and lost his latter age's frost
And his beard, Niagara-like, unfroze;
The monsters in the Sun rejoiced; the Inconstant One,
The unwedded Moon, forgot her woes;
A shiver of re-birth and deliverance round the Earth
Went gliding; her bonds were released;
Into broken light the breeze once more awoke the seas,
In the forest it wakened every beast;
Capripods fell to dance from Taproban to France,
Leprechauns from Down to Labrador;
In his green Asian dell the Phoenix from his shell
Burst forth and was the Phoenix once more.

So Death lay in arrest. But at Bethlehem the bless'd
Nothing greater could be heard
Than sighing wind in the thorn, the cry of One new-born,
And cattle in stable as they stirred.