

Advent Hands (by Catherine Alder)

I see the hands of Joseph.
Back and forth along bare wood they move.
There is worry in those working hands,
sorting out confusing thoughts with every stroke.
“How can this be, my beautiful Mary now with
child?”

Rough with deep splinters, these hands,
small, painful splinters like tiny crosses
embedded deeply in this choice to stay with her.
He could have closed his hands to her,
said, “No” and let her go to stoning.

But, dear Joseph opened both his heart and hands
to this mother and her child.
Preparing in these days before
with working hands
and wood pressed tight between them.
It is these rough hands that will open
and be the first to hold the Child.

I see the hands of John,
worn from desert raging storms
and plucking locusts from sand ripped rocks
beneath the remnant of a Bethlehem star.
A howling wind like some lost wolf
cries out beneath the moon, or was that John?
This loneliness, enough to make a grown man
mad.
He’s waiting for this, God’s whisper.
“Go now. He is coming.
You have prepared your hands enough.
Go. He needs your servant hands,
your cupping hands to lift the water,
and place his feet upon the path to service and to
death.

Go now, John, and open your hands to him.
It is time.” I see a fist held tight and fingers
blanched to white.
Prying is no easy task.
These fingers find a way of pulling back to old
positions, protecting all that was and is.
Blanched to white. No openness. All fright.
But then the Spirit comes.

A holy Christmas dance begins
and blows between the twisted paths.
This fist opens slowly, gently, beautifully,
the twisted fingers letting go.
Their rock-solid place in line has eased.

And one by one the fingers lift
True color is returned
And through the deepest of mysteries,
The holiest of holies,
O longing of longings
Beyond all human imagining this fist,
as if awakened from Lazarus’ cold stone dream
reaches out to hold the tiny newborn hand of
God.