

THE BALLAD OF THE NATIVITY

Have you ever given birth to a baby?
Was he born in a hospital bed,
With doctors and nurses attending you
And your husband stroking your head?
D'you remember that sharp apprehension
When you'd thought of the labour of birth?
Did they tell you, to help reassure you,
"It's the most natural thing upon earth"?

And did they give you injections
To help with discomfort and pain?
Give a drip, or have to use forceps,
And say "Come on, dear, push again."?
And when your ordeal was over,
And you held your new child in your arms,
Were you glad of good medical treatment
And advice, to allay all your qualms?

Well, Mary was only a young girl.
She'd never known childbirth before.
But she had to make do with a stable.
She had to give birth on the floor.
But maybe that kind-hearted inn keeper
With hot water sent over his wife;
And fresh straw, and a lantern and blankets,
To help to deliver new life.

In the stench of the beasts of the stable,
In the straw, on the ice-hard earth floor,
In the blood and the sweat and the groaning,
While a chill wind blew in at the door,
In the light of a guttering lantern,
While a radiance grew overhead,
God took his first breath, and wailed briefly.
In a manger they fashioned his bed.

And when *her* ordeal was over
And she held her new child to her breast,
And the shepherds had finally left them
And she felt herself able to rest;
Did Mary caress her young infant
And know that she cradled God's son?
Could she understand all the portents
And realise why he had come?

D'you think she could see the significance
Of the Gold and the Incense and Myrrh -

Of our King, and our God, and his dying,
And the grief that was waiting for her?
She has shared every new mother's labour,
And with many shares anguish of loss.
There's a price to be paid for each new life.
Our God paid for ours on the cross.

Anne Wild
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