

It was the Night before Christmas

(A Reflection by Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, a few months after his birth)

John's crying.

*By the time I get myself to him
the let down has started,
my clothes blotch with milk
a point of pride for me
a discussion point
for the women of the neighbourhood*

*It's six months since Mary came
generations younger
but like me, secluded in pregnancy
though for different reasons:
me too old, she unwed.*

*But it was so good to have someone to talk to
to hear her voice
given that Zechariah had been struck dumb.
Soon she will have the joy
that has come to me
her child full of promised hope
although where she will be
when the birth pangs start
is anyone's guess.*

*They must be past Jericho by now
but what a lonely uphill stretch
to Jerusalem and on to Bethlehem.
Have our messages got through
to the distant family?
Will they have room?
What does Joseph know of birth?
What if the pains begin miles from anywhere?
It was no fun for me
but she's young.....*

*Zechariah's words have been coming back
since that first naming.
I was so afraid he wouldn't back me up
but he wrote it big and clear
and slowly at first
he began to speak
till now, in a big rush
he's come out with a song:
'Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel.....'
Line after line....
Stuff that sends shivers
down my spine:
'Because of the tender mercy of our God
by which the rising sun
will come to us from heaven....' (Luke 1.68-80)*

(Claire Sinclair, December 2022)