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the Icon Unpainted

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THE ICON UNPAINTED

Br. Kendall, O.Carm. (Kendall Ketterlin)

How do we tell the story?
when God came into the world,
when Enoch's hand touched his children,
Abel's blood poured into new flesh,
Ezekiel's wall crumbled,
and Rachel's lullaby came into verse

How do we imagine eternity on the brink?
waiting, sleeping,
crawling toward becoming

A darkness covering the Abyss
and mighty wind sweeping over the waters,
The Father about to speak:
breath taken,
mouth open,
Word has been formed,
silence holds, still

How do I convey the image of that
enduring silence?
frozen in the lake,
dulled to the piercing lance,
unshattered with the crispness of glass;
a silence sustained in the murkiness of ice,
dense, compact, drowning,
swallowing cries from the wilderness,
unheard and unknown from above,
unseen, dying, undisturbed,
surrendered without witness

How do I paint the portrait of that final
breath before battle?
the waves not yet crashing against the
shore,
water unbroken,
city walls firm and unblemished,
guardsmen and attendants still sleeping;
an eve of slumber without soldiers,
without friends,
neither companion, nor betrayer,
no allies, no enemies,
no borders, territories, or battle lines

How do I draw this world?
on the precipice,
unaware,
without shot fired,
no arrow loosed,
nor spear thrust;
the sword remains in the scabbard,
a prince arriving in the night,
the King of dawn
placing upon his shoulders
the burdens of a people,
the yoke of their toil,
tears of banishment
and wounds of adultery

How can I speak with words?
simple and colorful;
three ambassadors waiting in blackness,
bells ringing from the girth beneath,
tributes of anointing jostling firmly;
twelve feet marching
toward the dawn in stillness and perfect
quiet,
the signs of allusions treading before them,
eyes of Seraphim trailing behind

How do I express the words of a mother?
steeped with child;
a mother caught in the midst of her own
son,
waiting to give birth,
a package given to the world,
and birth nearly given to her;
“Was my heart not burning from within
as you danced in my womb?”

How can I describe the father?
Reigns grasped in hand,
motionless, frozen as he leads the mother
forward;
the sweat of his brow that does not drip to
the sandy earth,
worn and tattered sandals
scuffing silently against stone footholds,
a foot planted in air,
the rock ready to receive its servant

How do I paint these silhouettes in their
size?
shadows motionless against the stars
captured in stills for the Maker to seize;
life-blood flowing and churning against the
curtain,
the warmth of the universe lending
support,
vibrant lives cooled in anonymity?

How do I write in words and in shadows?
the moments before the coming of God into
the World;
that singularly perfect silence of baited
breath,
Peace raining toward a parched earth,
a thirst unquenched,
paused before the droplets spill

How do I recall that moment when he is not
reached,
but has arrived?
when the bounty is paid,
before the tribute is received;
before the hammer falls,
and the wood splits,
the splinters creak,
the crown is woven, and
an already dying tree is planted on the hill

We move forward, motionless into the
distance,
quenching, gnawing, hungering and
satisfied in that one
perfect instant of life
poured into the smallest vessel,

soundless, careless, feeling-less,
emptiness staring above the mother's eyes
toward the heavens, from where he came,
agaze at the stars and moon he created,
frightened, tearful, waiting and impatient.
Life come into existence for all time,
Light to be celebrated for all time,
in all time, all places, caves, caverns and
 crevices,
on every hill and mountain,
through the valleys, rivers and highways,
through the depths of oceans and glaciers
 afloat.

How do we tell of this tiny moment?
the world waited,
the mother and father waited,
wise men paused in calculated journey;
the stars, the shepherds,
the angels, the kings, warriors and maids;
the promises fulfilled,
prophets restored and reminded;
Wisdom waiting to be spoken,
waiting to be beckoned,
to be sent and embraced by all,
arrived,
not yet here;
the Son's rays piercing the night—
this very moment when his light reaches
 the young babe's eyes,
before warmth touches his face;
the moment as the boat leaves the shore,
the waters ripple,
breath stirs the sand,
and the land stares vacantly before it is
 free.

How do I tell of this moment?
when a virgin cries in birth that she does
 not give
and looks to the face of the Father:
how will this be,
that I may receive the gift unopened,
that the one to deliver me
should be delivered unto me?

How do we tell of This moment?
What simple task?
What simple life can we paint
for a picture of eternity stopped,
mid-step of its journey?

The hoof falls; the bridle bit; reigns grasped tightly in hand; eyes affixed forward; heart racing wildly; palms sweating; seat churning, burning against saddled leather; bells ringing gently under girth, blankets rustling in absent wind; doors unanswered at the knocking; moonlight glimmers in silhouettes; mouths stand agape; ready to receive, the Word unspoken; the Icon unpainted.

