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LOUISE GLÜCK

NATIVITY POEM

It is the evening
of the birth of god.
Singing &
with gold instruments
the angels bear down
upon the barn, their wings
neither white
wax nor marble. So
they have been recorded:
burnished,
literal in the composed air,
they raise their harps above
the beasts likewise gathering,
the lambs & all the startled
silken chickens … And Joseph,
off to one side, has touched
his cheek, meaning
he is weeping—
But how small he is, withdrawn
from the hollow of his mother’s life,
the raw flesh bound
in linen as the stars yield
light to delight his sense
for whom there is no ornament.