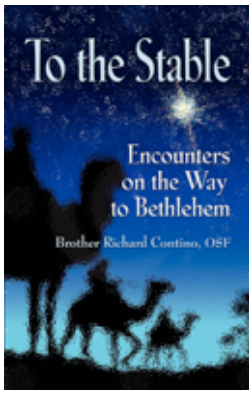




# To the Stable

Encounters  
on the Way  
to Bethlehem

Brother Richard Contino, OSF



*TO THE STABLE: Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem* is an innovative yet spiritually reflective portrayal of the Gospel accounts of the birth of Christ. This imaginative and prayerful narrative of the Christmas story uses literary creativity to stir the soul, touch the heart and give pause in order to praise God and give thanks for the greatest gift possible---that of His Son Jesus Christ.

# **To The Stable: Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem**

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This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

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## PART ONE

### A SHOOTING STAR

*The light that embraced the evening sky  
appeared unusual –  
it could perhaps on this night  
be considered strange.  
The light unusual and strange  
burst literally upon  
the night sky and caught so many  
below the firmament  
by surprise.*

*Many of the people who gazed  
upon this light came to realize that  
it was a star.  
Peculiar indeed it was,  
strange no doubt  
and yet to many who beheld  
its light set in the firmament  
one thing was certain –  
this star was a sign perhaps even an omen!*

*In a world unsteady  
and precarious, this light,  
this star was an anchor etched  
into the backdrop of planets,  
stars and an array of galaxies  
that almost defies numbering.*

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*Some of these galaxies, stars and planets are  
primordial and distant while others  
are robust, vibrant and expansive—  
as one beheld this canvas of the sky  
it is as if such were an easel.*

*and an invisible Hand with brush stroke  
and finesse painted the stars that danced  
with an abundance of glimmer and sparkle----*

*but this light  
this star  
was different  
for even the simple of mind and heart  
that dwelt among the land below  
as they gazed upward they knew  
they surmised  
something was amiss!*

*Although the star's appearance  
was relatively recent its discovery  
was the topic of curious conversation  
and even heated debate in houses  
throughout the Roman world and  
even to the regions and realms  
not yet under the care and the  
control of Caesar and the  
Senate of Rome.*

*However, this star  
was not solely in view of Roman eyes  
but had captured the eyesight of the throng  
of humanity.*

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*This star commissioned by Yahweh made  
if but for a brief moment the world one again  
as in the days before Babel, global, at peace  
and in harmony yet humanity on such nights that the star  
appeared was asleep to  
such knowledge as the age of man was still  
so naive.*

*As the eyes of humanity absorbed  
such a wondrous sight,  
scholars from the East used their knowledge  
of astrology to chart the course of  
such a heavenly but mysterious body  
of Light.*

*How amazed where they or one  
should say instead awed and  
astonished with such an initial  
discovery and to realize  
that if the star alone was not  
cause for pause the reality that  
the star did not move....incredible!*

*What a remarkable sight.  
A star brilliant in its aura,  
vast of dimension of breath and width  
did not traverse through the  
blanket of the night sky.*

*This was no common star  
but a light touched by grace  
and guided by an unseen hand.*

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*Strange indeed the scholars  
mused and pondered and elicited  
various comments and commentaries  
on the sight.*

*But wise men not just of the mind  
but of the heart, known as and  
called magi understood that this  
star was more than just a strange  
light. This star was a message.*

*They bowed their heads in deep  
recognition and reverence for the  
messenger was no earthbound mortal.*

*They sensed the hand of Divinity  
and sought to unravel the  
layers of Mystery that  
had been set before  
them.*

*The people though were  
not sure if such a star was  
a sign of good fortune or  
a harbinger of evil or  
perhaps even worse such  
as unexpected tragedy,*

*Ready  
to bounce unannounced and  
afflict suffering upon the  
masses of people  
struggling  
just to survive in a*



*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*civilized world that as yet  
needed to acquire a tamed heart!*

*The rich and powerful were often  
safe and spared the suffering  
that so often befell the numerous  
legions of the poor.*

*These poor had but one wish  
and such was simply for  
a piece of bread and even  
peace not just of the mind  
but peace from war, violence and  
sheer and rampant injustice.*

*Most who held such thoughts  
did so within the full view  
of this gleaming and teeming sight  
that was strange and luminous.*

*A heavenly light and even such  
a sight would make the rich and safe,  
the poor and fearful  
all a little more uneasy and unsure.*

*How fragile and uncertain are the plans  
of man.  
How short are the threads of ones life when  
compared to the heavens and the dazzling  
splendor.*

*To the Stable*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*This star did not go  
unnoticed by the powerful of  
the world for such a sight caught the  
attention of the Roman emperor,  
His glorious and magnificence, Augustus Tiberius  
who ordered his poets and minstrels to make music  
and prose in celebration.*

*Celebration of a star that Augustus  
had now decreed had announced first to the  
heavens and now to the earth and all the  
peoples of the world great tidings,  
for Augustus, now Caesar would be ranked  
among the gods.*

*While Rome busied itself with  
the arrival of a new god in  
their midst,  
the star that had made its  
impression so profound upon the  
scene just several months now  
in the making something even stranger  
than the star's performance began to unfold.*

*The star's light, shape  
silhouette and even position  
had become significantly  
pronounced in just the last few  
hours.*

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*For just when the heavenly body  
became a welcome addition to the  
routine of life and was the heart  
of conversation mixed with the bizarre  
tales of god making in Rome, the star  
moved ever closer.*

*As the days grew longer and darker  
the star's form had dramatically  
shifted position.  
The approaching festival of Saturnalia  
in honor of the Roman god Saturnus  
was quickly gathering the attention of  
the peoples of the vast  
Pax Romano.*

*Celebration yes,  
omens notwithstanding,  
the festival celebrating another  
light would and could counter the  
concerns that this star  
now beheld.*

*In the midst of daily life  
astrologers and wise men  
set their gaze and intuitive sights  
on this star that tested and tried  
their knowledge and wits,  
sparked their curiosity  
and enflamed their desire  
to learn the reason why such  
a unique appearance challenged  
common sense and the natural order*

*To the Stable*

*of the universe  
as they have understood and  
experienced.*

*Roman Vestal virgins proclaimed the star  
to be their bridegroom thus  
endorsing the superiority of the  
virgins and their style of life  
sealing these special women with the  
mantle of status and power.*

*Caesar himself noted and acknowledged  
the Vestal's claim deciding that even one  
who sought to wear a diadem not simply of  
a ruler but now of a god, defined and  
deified needed the approval of these women.*

*He bowed and paid them tribute because even Caesar  
knew that altars and shrines would be raised to  
the glory and honor of a new god that was  
to be made not born and so a little wink to  
these virgins would in the end place the  
name of Augustus Tiberius among the lineage  
of the gods.*

*He would not be mortal but immortal  
and the taste of the nectar of the gods would slake  
his thirst for power amidst the pride that  
anointed his body with the fragrance  
of lust and glory....but how profane and  
undignified.*

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*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Far from the marble and stone  
of the streets of the capitol of Rome  
where power resides in a man  
with the name of Tiberius and  
imprinted upon the world by the  
cold steel of legionnaires swords.*

*Where a man's will becomes a law  
a decision is born that will impact the  
world and the course of time and history  
because a man who attempted to be  
an equal to the mythic gods of ancient times  
would toy with humanity and issue a decree.*

*Tiberius thought the strange star and its sudden  
appearance a blessing and no reason for  
alarm.  
A blessing and divine benediction upon  
his venture to enter the ranks and  
family of the gods.*

*However, even a god needs gold.  
Gold to build shrines and temples,  
to lay altars of granite and fine  
polished marble and of course  
celebrations and festivals  
befitting a new born god.*

*The people of Rome deserved to have  
an emperor and now god that  
would be the envy of monarchs and*

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*finally force those Jewish rebels and  
malcontents to bend a knee before  
a god they can actually see.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*The cost of marble and the  
desire for gold spurred an  
arrogant master of the world  
or so he thought,  
to devise a plan that would  
allow the unseen Jewish God  
to demonstrate His power and grandeur  
in a manner so unrefined and  
perhaps just a little undignified.*

*Such a plan of Augustus would  
cause chaos in this peaceful land  
but humanity would hardly notice  
the subtle shift the world and  
history would be subject to.*

*A shift so gentle many would  
not realize that the hand of  
Yahweh was holding time and  
caressing such within the radiance  
of this glowing and pulsing star.*

*The glow of the star was intensifying  
and the light appeared as if rays of  
energy danced as the touch of Yahweh  
holding time reverberated throughout  
the cosmos.*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*Yet, on this planet, diminutive,  
insignificant but held in  
the memory and mind of God,  
still could not hear the sound and voice  
that circled the heavens and was  
resting on the earth.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*From the East far from the  
throne of Caesar and the busy  
forum of the city of Rome,  
men learned and wise convened  
a council to discuss the  
appearance of this sign in the  
sky.*

*With instruments of glass,  
magnified smooth layer  
upon layer ground into a  
fine mirror.*

*They placed the disc glistening  
from its polished shine  
to survey the heavens and  
view a star that boldly hung and graced  
the dome of the night sky.*

*They positioned the disc  
in the center of a contraption  
that appeared more sinister than wise.  
But in the hands of these gentle and kind men  
of scrolls and learning,*

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*what seemed impossible took root  
in the center of the mirrored circle for  
the star appeared and the men gasped.*

*Gasped – for the image was that of  
the star so distant now so close at hand  
in such visible sight by human eyes  
who hoped and perhaps dared to decipher  
its meaning and message by the  
glance of their eyes and the wave of their  
minds.*

*They sought in council together  
to gather the knowledge that this  
star held!*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Pouring through scrolls and manuscripts that  
these men of learning held with such reverence  
and devotion, unrolled the words of the ages,  
of Socrates, Homer, Virgil and even that  
of Moses and of the various men and women  
who prophesized about a star.*

*They predicated that such a star was meant  
to usher in an age of peace and of  
harmony. Was it possible that this star now  
present in the sky above, seen by the eyes of men  
and women numbering now in the millions  
upon millions.*



*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*Such a star was spanning the globe and even continents  
and masses of land yet to be discovered by the  
wanderings of man. The sight of this star was  
viewed by subjects of an empire they thought  
was the center of the world.*

*These men of ancient wisdom held the  
answer they knew in the rolls of  
parchment now set before them.  
As their lips murmured as they read  
the words before them and their fingers  
touched the skins of ink and characters they  
were confident the answer and key lie hidden  
in the jumble of words now before them.*

*Lips moving in almost silent prayer a man  
of learning by the name of Balthazar came  
across the Psalms of a distant people  
known in the past as Hebrews  
now simply called Jews.*

*These inhabitants of the Roman  
province of Palestine are a unique people  
focusing their existence upon a very  
interesting concept – the belief of  
an entire people in just one God –  
Yahweh by name.*

*As Balthazar read the lines of the  
text set before him, his grave expression  
and serious demeanor grew lighter and excitement  
woke his sleeping heart and silent  
mind to something missing in his life*

*To the Stable*

*and the world and that is joy born of God  
called enthusiasm.*

*He read again the sacred text and  
a smile appeared upon the wise man's  
face and lips as his heart took in  
and savored these words*

*“Blessed be the Lord,  
the God of Israel,  
who alone does wonderful  
deeds.*

*Blessed be his glorious  
name forever, may all  
the earth be filled with  
the Lord's glory.  
Amen and Amen.*

*Was this strange and singular God  
responsible for the star that was filling  
the earth with wonder and awe?  
Was this another one of Yahweh's wondrous  
deeds for a God who can split the Red Sea  
in two could make a star dance at His command!  
Wise men, prophets, seers and sages  
all raised a weary eye to the night sky and each in one's own  
thoughts wondered why!*

*Above the dome that covers the  
earth a celestial kingdom opens wide  
the gates that lead to the court of the  
Great King.*

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*There is much excitement in this  
Kingdom of Light that the star is  
only a faint glimpse of for this  
Kingdom glides above the firmament just  
touching the sky.*

*So close to the earth yet so  
distant are the worlds of man and God.  
This is no Mount Olympia that  
creates gods of myths and dreams but the  
place where a throne of light embraces the  
regal and divine court of a Jewish God called  
Yahweh and gives birth to a star that now amazes  
the imagination of man and woman.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Between the celestial court of heaven and the  
mahogany tables of wise men excited in  
discussion and speculation as scrolls  
were unrolled and voices raised unknown  
that both heaven and these wise men would  
participate in a gesture so grand  
that not even Augustus realized that  
Yahweh is about to envelope the earth  
in a Divine embrace for the Son  
Divine would embark upon a spectacular adventure  
that the breath of God would proclaim the  
Word made flesh.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

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*The Son whom the Father loves  
will become a man,  
heaven holds its breathe as notes  
of songs of praise are abruptly halted  
silence and then the magnificent strains  
of Hosanna and Alleluia ring out through  
the chambers of heaven.*

*Below this celestial orchestra sounding  
the sweet sounds of joy and hope to a waiting world  
make the star itself leap with untold joy  
and vibrations of glory yet to be revealed.*

*To the scrolls of a prophet named Isaiah  
does Balthazar now engage for words of  
confirmation that a new day has dawned  
and that a god indeed would be born  
not in the halls of Rome but in some  
unclear environment yet to be made known  
and that this star was the signal that  
not a god alone but a king would grace the  
planet and proclaim a kingdom that will see no  
end.*

*Balthazar engrossed in the scrolls before  
him that are the record of the Divine preparing  
the way for a new age and kingdom unknown before  
and unseen in the records of man.  
Line after line he examines, reads and reflects  
and then suddenly words filled with hope  
leap towards the glance of this pensive and  
seeking man.*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*From the text of parchment aged but fresh with the words of Yahweh, "God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners". (Isaiah 6: 1-1).*

*Excited and with scroll in hand a magi aged and learned races quite unlike his style to the other room.  
Caspar and Melchior themselves engrossed in sacred texts of Egypt and of Persia look startled as the racing and panting Balthazar enters the room.*

*Scrolls in haste slide from the table and fall unattended to the floor,  
literature of history and faith tumble upon the marble and tile perhaps in tribute to the arrival of the prophecy that awaits these three men of hope and a world still gazing at stars and wondering.*

*I have found what we are searching for.  
A path to determine why this star is the sign we and so many like us are hoping for.  
How amazing that a God who controls the heavens would set a star in place so that we his servants can toil and find the key to unravel the mystery that is set before us.*

*And so with the two men listening Balthazar reads the passages and thus begins*

*To the Stable*

*an excited and dramatic conversation  
that finds these men of faith reading an  
ancient text so that a mystery can be  
unraveled and hope restored to a waiting  
and anxious world.*

*This star they maintain and proclaim  
is indeed a good sign of good news.  
The message is clear yet so  
profound this unseen God who  
holds the universe in His hands  
is taking notice of His creatures  
and will free them from fear and  
anxiety.*

*These three learned men know that  
not the gods of Rome are able  
to set the hearts of men at ease  
but these words of Isaiah have  
set their own hearts racing  
not in fear but in excitement.*

*It is about hope and  
to feel the human pulse race with  
joy and not suspicion and thus  
they examine the scrolls for  
ample good news that awaits a  
world that struggles to breath  
as the dust of daily life clouds  
their view of how beautiful  
the world is meant to be.*

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*Would an unseen hand  
and mind without limit  
not set the world spinning  
towards the light but men and  
women see only the darkness.*

*Good news,  
bind up,  
liberty  
and finally release  
could they not see that this  
star was of hope and not doom.*

*Excitedly Caspar took the scrolls  
and examined them without  
stopping, faster and faster  
his eyes raced through the  
text as Balthazar attempted  
but to no avail to slow him down.  
Balthazar knew such words needed to  
take root for their purpose and  
message to be made know.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*With a sigh and a smile he pointed  
to what he searched for,  
“I, your God, hold your right hand; it is I who  
say to you, Do not fear, I will help you” (Isaiah 41:13).  
No words sounded so sweet to the ears of men and like  
children, Caspar and Balthazar made a joyful noise  
as they twirled round the room catching Melchior  
totally off guard and then they shared with him*

*To the Stable*

*the text they have discovered and he too joined the dance.*

*While men in the East gave a joyful noise to the Lord, in the West in the city of Rome a man sat upon a throne and demanded obedience from a world about to learn what happens when the plans of Yahweh and men collide.*

*A decree was to go out to all the known world. What a fantastic plan and a brilliant devise to tax a world and fill the treasury with gold and silver so that a man puffed up with pride could live large and build to his fame temples and shrines so that the masses will glorify him and set about the task of adoring a god of such grand designs that even the simple and low would marvel at the magnificence of Augustus now truly divine. Proclaim a census throughout the land. Each man must return to his place of birth and there register with his family and kin. Such a numbering of the world had not been done before and now such a decree will account for every man woman and child. Even cattle and pottery will be counted. Augustus beamed as he thought of his treasury house filled to the brim.*

*But my Lord they counted this census will disrupt the world and cause hardships and suffering. Perhaps great Augustus another plan smaller*



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*in scale could achieve the same results.*

*Yahweh was weaving the plan and no mere mortal could counter the stake that God had taken in the life of man and woman upon this planet.*

*Heaven gazed down and angels hearing the discussion between Augustus and his staff and they smiled in a manner that only celestial beings can as they realized how petty were these men who considered themselves rulers for within the vaults of heaven's kingdom there is but one Lord and King and they sing Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna on high! To Him day and night!*

*Assembled now before the great throne a multitude of angels hover before the Light and in layers upon layers Seraphim, Dominions, Virtues, Archangels. Powers, Thrones, Cherubim and Principalities. The light arrayed was dazzling and without end. Rays and brilliance set before the throne as they covered their eyes and bowed low for the voice of God began to proclaim a plan that involved a God, an insignificant nation and town and the best laid plans of a man who thinks he rules the world.*

*and then the silence of the heavens was broken for the words unlike our hearing were uttered with tone and tempo that the vault of this kingdom of light filled with a sweet scent and a fragrance as incense drifted towards the vast and unlimited reaches and then the clear expression of joy filled the heavens as God uttered;*

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*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*And then the spectacular and astounding  
was uttered for all those assembled to hear,  
God will become human and dwell upon the earth.  
The Divine will place Himself within a covering of human flesh.  
He will be born yet begotten,  
He will walk not float or levitate  
He will speak with human syllables  
and be confined by the limits of the human mind and  
not have benefit of the imagination of the Divine.*

*God will not be able to traverse the measure of time or history  
but for a moment God will permit  
time to touch the face of God and to hold God  
prisoner.*

*Did the celestial host understand the magnitude  
of what God now just designed and ordained?  
Will God leave heaven, how will this transpire?  
Will heaven be left barren as God travels the immensity of the  
universe and deigns to reside  
on a planet beautiful but of no consequence.  
Why this need and desire for the Divine to embrace  
these creatures who neither care nor fully comprehend how love  
will caress their world and forever leave its imprint.*

*It is almost as if God is planning a marriage of humanity with  
Divinity...how odd and strange even for  
the Being of Light to wed these mortals to mystery  
they cannot comprehend nor aspire to attain.  
Why this fascination with these creatures.*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*And from the celestial throne of Light the  
Being that spoke not with words but with  
might without loud vocal fanfare all in attendance  
knew and understood that the answer to their  
questions and their confusion is nothing less  
and nothing more than the pure essence of the Divine  
Himself, it is Love.*

*What God has created in His own image  
and likeness the Divine loves intently  
and intensely.  
Love is what the heavens are composed  
of and Love is the very essence that  
maintain the angelic powers that  
forever sing, laud, honor and glory  
for ever and for ever before the  
throne without ceasing.*

*Love is the heartbeat of Divinity  
and the fragrance of the universe but upon  
the earth because of sin this  
fragrance is distant and unknown.*

*The fragrance of love whose abode  
is really the heavens will travel  
the course of history and be confined  
by time and rest for a while  
upon the earth and God will  
once again walk in the cool of the  
evening with man and woman.*

*Yet they will not see nor  
will they fully understand or*

*To the Stable*

*perceive this great gift of love  
that will be bestowed upon the brow  
of man with a kiss and embrace  
as God becomes man.*

*Heaven shakes in utter wonder  
and amazement that God will  
walk once more upon the earth  
not in the form of the divine but  
hidden within a cloak of human flesh.*

*What love, what devotion this  
God has for human beings.  
What grace will be poured out from the  
heavens and rest upon the earth.  
Love will walk upon the earth  
and they will call Him Jesus.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Mankind has no idea nor  
a clue what God has afoot  
to redeem and heal them  
and to bring them home again.*

*God rejoices in the expectation  
of what the Son will achieve  
freely asked and freely consented  
the Son will place the mantle  
of Divinity aside and squeeze  
within the frame of a child.  
Heaven wonders can such Love  
be contained.*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*Ah! how foolish even you angelic powers  
for nothing is impossible for God  
that a babe with tears will cry aloud and  
humankind will never be the same again.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Creation halts for just a moment  
so infinitesimal that earth never notices as  
the universe sighs in relief that salvation  
is in progress, redemption is on its way.*

*The decay that has contaminated the universe is  
about to be stayed as the Son prepares to  
enter a world that He created and to become  
subject to the creatures He ordains and orders  
the scale for life and death.*

*Oh wonder Oh wonder  
magnificent and grand are the  
designs of this God who unleashes  
through the cosmos the diamonds of love cascading  
to rest upon that planet that the universe  
embraces in a firmament of stars, planets  
and suns of unimaginable light.  
Upon this planet will God descend and  
the galaxies and solar entities bow in reverence  
for such a planet will for a time become  
the home of God.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*To the Stable*

*In the chambers of the man now soon  
to be proclaimed a god, Caesar Augustus  
affixes his name and seal, to enroll the  
world by name and town, to count those  
he rules and to tax them boldly so as  
to raise to the sky temples and shrines  
to a mere mortal who thinks himself  
so grand and mighty and with applause  
from those he rules this chorus of  
man begin to chant words of  
praise to a man who they call god.  
And in some mockery to the celestial  
throne they bend their knees and sing  
Ave, Ave to Caesar and can barely  
hear the words that touch the star that  
hangs in adoration not to the man, a king now  
made a god but to the God that prepares  
to become a man.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

## PART THREE

### JOSEPH A JUST MAN, TOUCHED BY DREAMS AN ANGEL AND A STAR

*He was asleep but not  
peacefully for  
dreams and fantasy  
plagued his rest –  
Images raced through  
his mind and he awoke  
to the stillness of the  
night and his face bathed  
by the glow of that ever  
present star that all  
were aware of.  
It is the basis of conversation  
with all you meet these days,  
the star, its appearance  
and its possible meaning  
and message.*

*Joseph has no time  
to wonder about a  
star or its hidden  
portent – he places  
his faith and trust in  
no star but in the  
One God of His people,  
- Yahweh – the One  
constant in the life of  
the people of Israel*

*To the Stable*

*is Yahweh and not a star!  
Wiping the beads  
of perspiration from  
his brow the residual  
affect of a restless night  
he glances at the star  
and is intrigued for it  
appears to be hovering  
above his intended's home.*

*Ah! Miriam and  
the man so often  
stern and serious  
strong of character  
intent with life  
passionate for faith  
when his thoughts  
focused on his  
beloved his features  
soften, there is a  
glint in his eyes  
and a smile forming  
on his lips and as  
the light from the glow  
of that hovering star  
falls upon his face  
the look mirrors a man  
whose heart is bursting  
with joy, abundant with  
the human jewel so unique, so special,  
the bond between humans  
and the unbreakable  
thread that unites*



*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*the human soul  
and God, it is called  
LOVE.*

*The restlessness  
of the night  
stirred his passion  
and caused his  
heart to ache and yet dance  
to the music of falling in  
love – his mind  
so often preoccupied with  
the Torah and the worship of Yahweh.  
His time spent in the study  
of the Law –  
the reading of the ageless  
wisdom of the Chosen People-  
his people and his nation tied securely  
in time and history to the One God  
who called out to Abraham and made this  
people His own –  
but with his betrothal  
to the lovely Miriam  
his heart now on fire  
with love tonight is divided.  
And so rising from his mat  
that offers no sleep this night  
to the shop he goes where  
he toils to earn his keep  
and use his talent to support  
and keep a future wife and  
a house filled with sons  
and daughters.*

*To the Stable*

*There is no need  
to light a lamp  
for the star ever  
present night after  
night hovers so  
near that the streams of  
silvery glow brightens  
the shop as Joseph  
the sleepless lover  
gathers his tools  
to complete a secret project –  
a chest carved in beauty, with  
patience and love – molded with  
talent from wood cherished  
for a gift from the cedars  
of Lebanon for the woman  
who has captured his heart  
and sets his mind to wander  
and his lips instead of  
uttering prayers of  
praise mutters sighs  
and moans lamenting the time  
he is separated  
from the one he loves.*

*With the plane and lathe  
he molds and fashions  
the wood to bend to  
his touch and feel as  
a block of wood without  
real form and still  
so rough  
becomes pliant*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*and docile in the  
hands of a master  
craftsman, a carpenter  
of some renown.  
Rough wood  
becomes smooth  
as layers of resistance  
to change are peeled away  
with plane, toil, hands  
and patience.  
Beneath this toil and movement  
of skill and love the beauty  
of the wood now shines  
with the glow of that  
star.*

*With form complete  
a stump of wood  
becomes a chest and now  
with chisel begins the charm  
of design and style –  
each movement accompanied  
by creative imagining  
patterns of circles,  
lines and waves  
are etched into  
the cover and side panels  
for the chest is a love  
gift for his intended, his  
beloved, his bride to be –  
a gift prepared for the  
day of marriage when  
bedding and clothing*

*To the Stable*

*will find a place  
secure and safe in the  
home Joseph will take  
his bride ending the  
period of engagement  
and announcing to all  
that they Joseph and  
Miriam are husband  
and wife. According to Mosaic Law  
a man and woman shall cling  
to one another and shall  
become one flesh, one body.*

*In faithfulness  
and love marked  
by fidelity and  
intensity of emotion  
of heart and spirit,  
Joseph and Miriam  
will follow the  
pattern of life written  
in the pages of Scripture  
that model the  
love and covenant of  
Yahweh and His  
people Israel.*

*Through the ages  
Yahweh has tested  
and safeguarded  
this people first  
of a tribe known as  
Hebrew who become*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*a nation through the  
cleansings of the  
Red Sea and  
became a Chosen People  
upon a Mount called Sinai,  
when God and His Chosen  
became one through the Covenant  
and the Law.  
And so each marriage  
of the children of Abraham is  
held beneath the canopy  
that signifies the  
mount and the wine that celebrates  
the Law binds husband and wife  
in union with the Divine – no people  
have been so blessed, no nation so loved, no  
people so touched by the  
mystery of God  
revealed in the bonds of married Love.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*As he plied his trade  
to this chest of  
hope – Joseph  
remembered the  
stories of the past  
of faithful men and women  
who touched by the chord  
of the Covenant  
celebrate love Divine  
in the form of human  
flesh, spirit made one by*

*To the Stable*

*the kiss of God – the beating  
of a heart when love becomes  
life – and image and likeness  
of the very essence of the  
face of God.*

*Joseph remembers  
the love of Abraham and Sarah,  
Isaac for Rebecca, Jacob and  
Rachel and of the men and  
women of ages past like that  
of Esther, Gideon, Ruth and  
Naomi, Obed and Jesse and  
even that of David.*

*Faithfulness made whole  
through the cycle of  
hope when Yahweh  
made a promise to save  
the children of Eve.  
And the descendants  
of Abraham called  
Chosen await the  
Promise fulfilled  
with the coming of a Messiah  
to be born of the house  
of David, a line that  
Joseph by blood was linked connected  
also by history, ancestry and hope,  
and as he sanded the chest  
with a smooth finish he wondered  
when God would fulfill His  
promise and send the One who  
will save.*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*With chips array  
and sawdust in flight  
sleep suddenly fell  
upon Joseph and so he  
rested his weary head  
upon the chest  
and fell into a sleep  
deep and sound that up until now  
had escaped him.*

*The glimmering rays of the  
silvery light danced  
upon the brow, face and form of  
the now resting man.  
Breathing gentle, face  
serene and an archangel in  
flight before departing the  
sphere of earth's hold has  
one final task.  
No question to ask  
but a touch of compassion  
to bestow upon a son of  
Adam and a child of Abraham.  
Gabriel will be granting such  
for the question asked of his  
intended and Miriam's response-  
Let it be – fiat – will rob  
Joseph of his peace of mind,  
shatter his hope and consume  
his joy – what man would  
not despair when discovered that his wife to be  
and intended lover bears a child  
that is not the fruit of his*

*To the Stable*

*own loins but of another  
who plants a seed in a womb that  
he does not own.*

*An archangel knows little  
of the experience of  
human emotion but has visited  
this land often enough to know  
that when God's Word  
grows within the  
womb of a virgin  
emotions and talk  
of a distasteful clime  
will attack the  
mother and child  
and devastate and nearly  
destroy that man she loves  
and hopes to marry.*

*In a flash and in  
fact in just a word, yes  
her husband to be  
will scream NO  
until the golden drops of God's  
dreams break through his  
heart of stone and boulder of anger and rage  
and allows a human man to  
protect and guide a child not born  
but begotten of Spirit and Divinity  
that will birth the Word through  
an act of love not entwined by flesh! and  
we so many centuries later will still utter  
in disbelief – how can this be? but it is!*



*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*Who can understand or grasp the  
breath, depth or even the sheer girth  
of God's immense plan for the  
human race.*

*Joseph and Miriam do not  
fully comprehend for one says  
yes and freely accepts the  
bounty of God's love to find a place  
to take root and grow in her womb  
for the Word does indeed become  
flesh this night.*

*But what of the man Joseph?  
whose journey of faith  
leads him to travel  
the normal course  
of familiarity with  
town, family and friends!  
coupled with the  
comfort and assurance  
of the scrolls, the  
Law and the Wisdom of  
the Word – now with no  
sure footing he loses his hold  
and grasp and is absorbed  
by the pang of discomfort accompanied  
by nervousness and anxiety.*

*Joseph unaware  
but a partner nonetheless  
in the question Miriam his  
love and spouse to be  
answered with a yes*

*To the Stable*

*and unwittingly  
attached Joseph  
to the unfolding saga of the tears  
shed for paradise lost  
now on the cusp about be reclaimed –  
Joseph a simple man  
like Job of old is himself to be  
solely tested and tried this night!*

*Gabriel's flight  
from the celestial heights now among  
the mortal domain  
has achieved the task and  
once releasing the question  
from his bosom now empty  
wonders why the pang still  
harbors within and with  
his wings outstretched, the  
star aglow and in his  
palm he holds the yes  
of Miriam encased now in gold covering  
the diamond pearl drop of  
the fiat that breaks the hold of  
Lucifer and will release  
the cascading  
dew drops of hope  
upon the earth.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Unaware of the fabric of history  
and time now  
woven together by*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*the fingers of the Divine  
envelops Joseph in a dance  
and symphony of  
which he has been  
invited but has yet  
to learn the steps for the dance  
or the lyrics to the song.  
For in heaven the dance has begun  
and the music lofts through  
the celestial choir for a Virgin  
has said yes, the Father smiles  
and a man restless in sleep  
is about to be touched by the  
compassion of an angel  
who understands and will  
whisper hope amidst  
the tumble of anxious  
thoughts and so  
with angelic speed a drop of  
compassion flows from supernatural  
concern and rests upon the brow of  
the sleeping man  
who stirs, awakens and now  
ponders the star that  
beams from above and wonders how  
his beloved sleeps  
this night as well –*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Little is the man aware  
that his intended has  
been chosen by the*

*To the Stable*

*Divine that His people  
call Yahweh – and when the  
Most High's designs intersects  
the plans of man –  
Divine Mystery absorbs  
the plan and intervention  
touched by grace will  
invite believers to be amazed  
and somewhat perplexed by a God  
who demands more than  
we can give or imagine  
we are capable of giving.  
But alas the Lord of all creation  
knows the breaking point of  
his special creatures  
and bestows not just grace but the  
elixir of sleep, a remedy for  
restless hearts and troubled  
spirits.*

*As Gabriel ascends  
to the heights carrying  
with reverence the  
fiat of Miriam now  
touched by a tear from  
the restless Joseph – mercy  
is about to cover the earth and yet  
Miriam and Joseph must deal  
with emotions and questions  
that will momentarily drown  
their relationship and place  
in limbo a love and desire that  
can never fully be quenched*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*because God asked a question, a young maiden  
said yes and will remain a Virgin and a  
husband yet to be feels a premonition and  
begins to harbor doubts and an  
archangel attempts to heal  
what can be a broken heart  
and unravel a sacred trust and taint  
a woman's womb with a taste of  
compassion and whisper in the  
ear of a discontented man; be not afraid.*

*All the while this adventure of Gabriel  
this journey of hope is again  
spied by the demon Scout,  
who first tangled Gabriel, forced  
to retreat but did not hide or  
depart instead did shadow  
Gabriel upon his adventure through  
the firmament to the passageway of  
earth and settles upon a backwater  
village they call Nazareth and even  
Scout no great thinker even for a demon  
wonders why God sends an angel with  
a message to such a forsaken  
and desolate place.*

*Hearing and sight  
attuned to this  
celestial visit  
Scout is privy to  
a language he is unfamiliar  
for the sounds and sights he beholds  
is that of love –*

*To the Stable*

*foreign to his world  
disdained by his  
master Lucifer  
viewed as a weakness in  
the chain molded by Satan who  
chose pride and power and  
cast asunder the pearls  
of love upon a sea of disobedience  
and reigns now upon a molten  
lake of fire and sulfur.*

*Scout is a witness  
to the spectacular vision  
of the Annunciation,  
hears the fiat spoken  
and sees a God  
rest this moment in  
the prison of the womb  
becoming a captive of love  
and a prisoner for hope.  
What Scout views and then  
experiences feelings  
unknown in the beings of  
the damned for it is  
sorrow and regret for  
paradise lost and  
contrition for sin and  
shame and as Gabriel  
embraces the fiat in a  
tear of pearls, and brushes the  
brow of the sleeping Joseph, the  
tangle of strings of love weave in the  
body of a human the God made man*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*and a demon sighs  
and feels the wetness of the impossible  
for Scout sheds a tear.*

*Gabriel departs  
quickly and quietly  
the mission accomplished,  
the question released  
the response encased  
on its path to heaven but  
before he returns a touch of  
compassion to ease the heartache  
of a man soon to be confused  
and pained  
for his dearest  
has said yes  
to another and Joseph's heart  
will be broken  
his love despoiled  
and hope hangs by  
an unraveling thread  
of a future whose path may not be  
walked this night or even  
henceforth.*

*Joseph's brow touched  
by Gabriel awakens  
and is still plagued  
by fear and with  
determined purpose and resolve  
grasped the chest covered yet  
in the glow of that  
constant star.*

*To the Stable*

*Such a moment startles  
Scout who curious now shadows  
the racing man who  
darts through the deserted streets  
for his rapid movements  
only disturbs dogs whose  
barks follow the sound of sandals  
in flight  
with Scout in close pursuit.  
Was it fear?  
Premarriage jitters and doubts?  
or a haunting dream  
that causes this midnight jaunt –  
Flesh bathed in  
sweat  
heart racing  
breath quickens  
as he nears the treasure  
only to witness the golden  
thread of love has  
snapped  
- Miriam he is told  
went in haste to  
visit her cousin  
Elizabeth in the hills  
of Judea.  
As a tree felled  
by a storm – Joseph's  
heart tumbles, falls and  
breaks.*

*Why would she  
depart without*



*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*a word or even a note  
and how could her  
parents Anne and Joachim  
permit her to travel in the  
darkness of night –  
his strength ebbs  
his hold on the chest wanes  
as it crashes to the floor,  
the beauty of his craft is shattered  
by the news he has been  
told. His beloved and intended gone  
in haste for what he wonders  
could have transpired to cause such  
a hasty departure.  
His mind is plagued by phantoms of  
fear, worry and now  
doubt.  
Has she run off with  
another?  
The question pains him  
and casts a covering of grief  
and sadness for mother  
and father with heads cast down  
cannot look Joseph in the face  
nor gaze eye to eye.  
Amidst the rubble of  
the splintered and shattered chest  
his lips move in a curvature  
that forms a word that is like  
a dagger to the heart – unfaithful-  
a mother weeps, a father sighs and the one  
whom she has entrusted her life and her  
love now turns and leaves –*

*To the Stable*

*he is a man who has been robbed of love,  
a victim of passion gone afoul and astray,  
purity soiled with no promise and now no hope.*

*Tears streaming  
down his face caught off  
guard by such  
a chain of fate – his heart  
in pieces – love such a fraud-  
how could Miriam hold his life in her  
sweet embrace and then  
just smash so roughly their  
life and love that could have been  
with a mallet of deceit and the sword  
of unfaithfulness.*

*No one said a word  
for the look on their faces  
needed no words.  
The house was filled  
not with hope but with  
a scent that was of loss  
coupled not with love but fear  
and such a ghastly union  
that could only give birth  
to despair.*

*His heart matched  
the broken pieces  
of the chest that now symbolized  
their love and promise  
of marriage now  
broken, lost and fallen*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*on the rocks of misfortune  
and unrealized possibility  
now cast upon the churning  
seas of a relationship shattered,  
a bond undone, and a covenant  
not to be realized even before the  
very seal was to be set, the marriage  
bed enjoyed and love casts before swine  
left in the muck of disloyalty.*

*Scout is confused  
as he monitors  
these events and muses  
that the lives of humans  
are no bargain to envy  
nor a treasury of riches for  
he has witnessed the splendor  
of joy and the agony of sorrow.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*

*Joseph now a mix of feelings  
arrives at his home  
alone, forlorn and defeated  
reaches for a jug of wine  
to dull the pain and ease the ache  
under the watchful gaze  
of that star that now surrounds  
the man and gives a tender  
look to one who was just before  
so confident and sure now  
unsteady, unsure and shaken  
- the glow of the star hides*

*To the Stable*

*no detail of the pain –  
shows no mercy as sorrow  
is etched throughout the brow  
and face and the light  
casts down upon the form  
now bidden with sobs made  
more profound through the  
elixir of a drunken stupor-  
as the wine acts  
as medicine to  
deaden the suffering and  
to bandage the heart broken  
and sprained.  
And as the senses are dulled and  
feeling no pain the Cloud of the  
Unknowing descends yet again and bids  
an archangel to traverse the earthly  
sphere once again and offer to the child of man  
the compassion and assurance from  
the Holy One whose love pierces the  
wound of a broken heart and  
with the yes of Miriam returned to earth uncaps  
the vessel that holds the answer  
to the question that caused a child to  
become a mother leaving a man cold and  
alone – Gabriel allows the fragrance  
of the 'fiat' to embrace the man and  
a message is spoken within his heart  
and he hears – fear not – take the one you love as  
your wife – she will bear a child, the Son of Adonai-  
fear not your arms are needed  
to shield the one who said  
yes and your hands must guide*

*Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem*

*the Son destined to save you  
and all of Israel and this great  
world.*

*Fear not!*

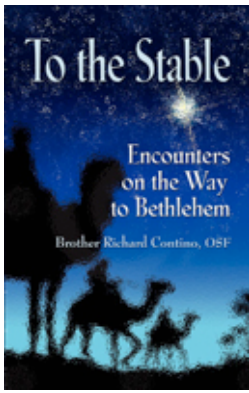
*Fear not!*

*she and you are both chosen  
she says yes and your  
obedience the Lord awaits.*

*In the light of the star the  
rays  
of light touch the face  
of the man drunk  
but held secure now  
in the translucent world  
of dreams and angels.*

*Behold I Make All Things New Again!*





*TO THE STABLE: Encounters on the Way to Bethlehem* is an innovative yet spiritually reflective portrayal of the Gospel accounts of the birth of Christ. This imaginative and prayerful narrative of the Christmas story uses literary creativity to stir the soul, touch the heart and give pause in order to praise God and give thanks for the greatest gift possible---that of His Son Jesus Christ.

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