

## SEASONS

(For Gethsemani)

by J. T. Ledbetter

## SUMMER

This summer of the soul  
 when Christ is still  
 on the cross  
 and the heavy air presses  
 relentlessly down,  
 there are no songs:

when the fields snap and pop  
 with penance  
 and clouds wash the dark hills  
 with rain

praise rises in the throat  
 until your mouth waters  
 and you must stop and sing,  
 breathe again this holy breath  
 beside the well where water  
 spreads in a dark circle  
 on the dusty ground  
 or in the cool shadows of  
 the old barn where the heavy cows  
 move against their stanchions:

until the distant bells call  
 you home and you bow in silence  
 in the primal heat that drives  
 you out of your poor world  
 of petty dreams and soured grace  
 to stand naked and silent under  
 the sudden rain of psalms,  
 your soul upturned, drinking.

## AUTUMN

In Autumn  
 when hours fall  
 about the house  
 carrying bits  
 of sunset with them  
 and windows blaze  
 with color, we raise  
 our heads in the  
 silent church to  
 listen for His coming.  
 In each measured  
 breath at night,  
 alone with our souls,  
 we speak those words  
 we remember — sounds  
 our hearts brought  
 to this holy house.  
 And in the gathering  
 dark we touch  
 His cross upon  
 the wall and wait  
 until sleep takes,  
 one by one,  
 our prayers, our cares  
 and dreams: and in  
 that silent Advent,  
 Christ comes!

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## WINTER

(And the Angel said  
to the dreaming Monk:  
“Tell me what you see.”)

“I see Jesus walking in the deep snow:  
and birds  
waiting on the empty fountain.

It’s the morning of my prayers  
and I hear a light step  
outside my window and later  
trace the web of ice  
from His footfall in the frozen ruts

My eyes covered by dead texts  
open to a new snow falling  
and I follow Him into the furnace  
of the cradle

No I cannot explain. Nor can I breathe.  
His hand is in my heart  
and my mouth sings psalms  
of no words  
and all the gravelly rivers stop  
in moonlight to listen  
to His breathing  
and foxes sleep in dens full  
of strange liturgies  
that coax the stars to dance  
with those floating beneath the ice  
as He passes into leaves whispering  
Hosannas over the iron hills:

And somewhere smoke curls to heaven  
smelling of sweet Jesus and Balsam  
carrying chipped off bits of prayers  
to God  
under a black canopy of wings quivering  
in the cold air  
thrumming hymns to earth  
to warm Him in the straw.

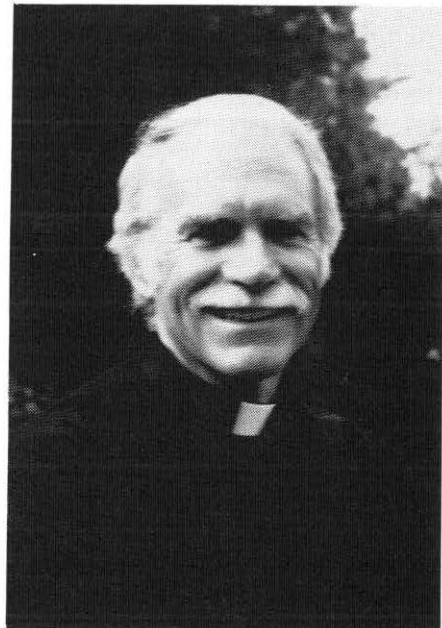
(“And now, dear Angel,  
you know what I see:  
what book of songs will you put it in,  
and who will sing to these  
holy men of Gethsemani?”)

## SPRING

Across the greening fields  
foxes blink in the starlight  
from their long death

and deep inside the wood  
the sound of sudden water running  
wakes us from our winter sleep  
and shakes our slow spirits  
robed in their winter psalms

and draws us to the frosty church  
where light breaks from the sepulchers  
of our souls as we touch the dew  
from Christ’s own well and sign His  
everlasting spring across our  
quickenning breasts.



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