

Seeing Haloes

Seeing Haloes

**Christmas Poems
to Open the Heart**

John Shea

Drawings by
Mark and Franklin McMahon



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

© 2017 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Shea, John, 1941– author. | McMahon, Mark, illustrator. | McMahon, Franklin, illustrator.

Title: Seeing haloes : Christmas poems to open the heart / John Shea ; illustrations by Mark and Franklin McMahon.

Other titles: Christmas poems to open the heart

Description: Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2017. |

Description based on print version record and CIP data provided by publisher; resource not viewed.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017006578 (print) | LCCN 2017029829 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814645840 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814645598

Subjects: LCSH: Christmas poetry.

Classification: LCC PS3569.H39115 (ebook) | LCC

PS3569.H39115 A6 2017 (print) | DDC 811/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017006578>

For Anne

Contents

Introduction

Christmas Poems to Open the Heart ix

Poems

Seeing Haloes 1

How the Word Made Flesh Seeks the Salvation of All 4

Christmas Coffee 7

Christmas Time 10

Spirits at Christmas 13

Green River Christmas 15

My Father's Shoulder 17

A Christmas Touch 19

Open Invitation 21

Christmas Tooth 24

Christmas Shopping 27

Christmas Remembered 34

Sharon's Christmas Prayer 36

Crèche Characters Ask Questions	39
The Angel	39
The Shepherds	43
The Sheep	46
The Wise Men	50
Joseph	53
Mary	55
The Child in the Manger	58
The Light Shines in the Darkness	62
Christmas Carolers	64
The Song of Zachary	65
The Song of Simeon	67
The Song of Mary	70
Beloved Child	74

A Christmas Touch

We received a book, *The First Christmas*,
to read to our grandson, Jack,
on his first Christmas.

Snuggled in Anne's lap,
he will feel our love
as she introduces him
to the crib characters.

Which reminds me of a time
at All Hallows outside Dublin.
At a break in the workshop,
I stepped into the courtyard.
A mother and child
were standing in front of a tall stone statue
of the Madonna and Child.
The mother lifted her daughter high.
"Touch Him, touch Him," she encouraged.
"He's a baby like you."

The baby touched the Baby,
let out a giggle-yelp,
and clapped her hands.

There was more in that touch
than I could say then
or than I can say now.

No matter
her warm hand felt cold stone.
No matter
her age of reason
was a season of tomorrows away.
No matter a photo record
would not be framed and hanged
on a wall in her house.

A Christmas touch is its own moment,
daring to reach for communion,
delighting in overcoming aloneness.

“Touch Him, Jack. Touch Him.
He’s a Baby like you.”

Open Invitation

The eighteenth-century Neapolitan crèche
on exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago
captures Christmas.

It has over 200 figures,
including 41 items of food and drink.

The usual crèche suspects
are woven into the bustle of the city.

The baby Jesus gestures to the King of Naples.

The wise men are next to bartenders,
shepherds mingle with merchants,
and the sheep share pasture
with horses, cattle, chickens, dogs, and cats.

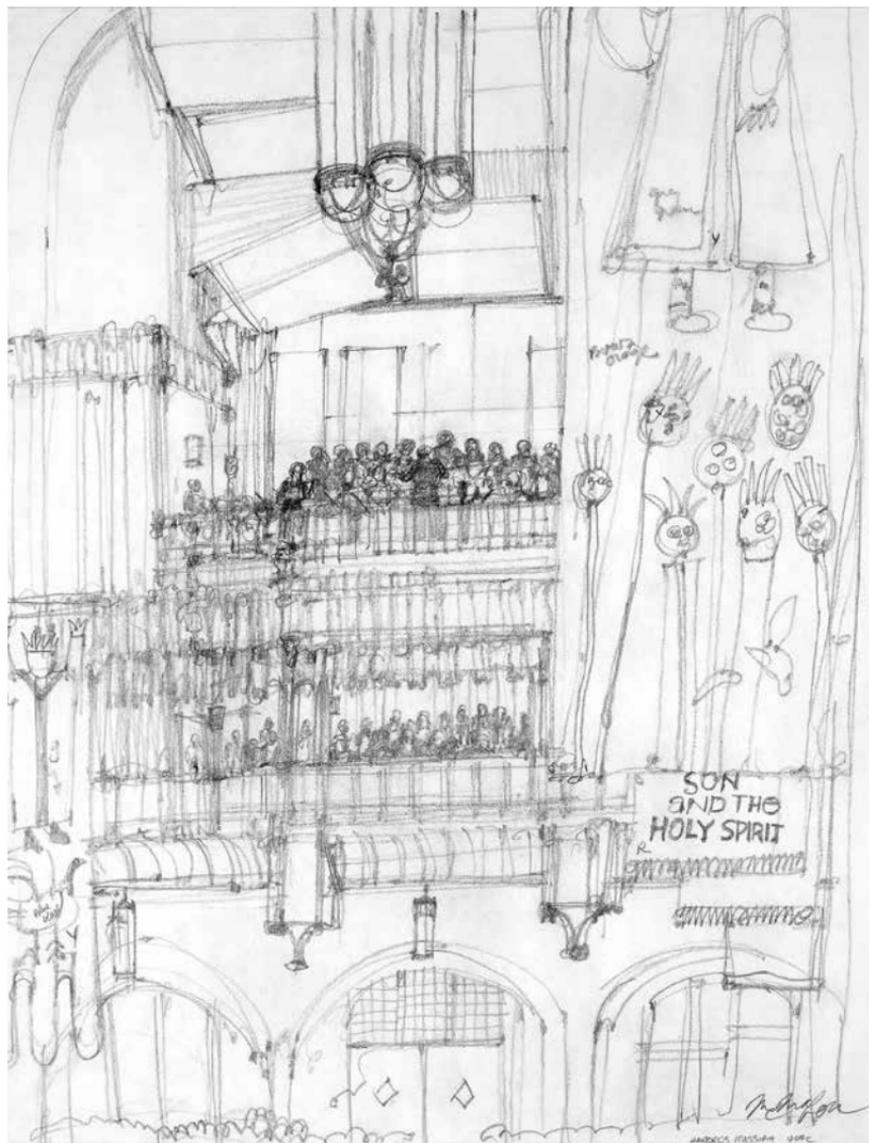
Jesus is born among people,
busy with the duties and pleasures
of the earth.

So take a lesson.

Invite company
into your crèche.

Put in a picture of Uncle Fred.
(I know he doesn't deserve it!)
Find that crystal turkey you were given
for always hosting Thanksgiving
and nuzzle it against Mary's side.
Put a photo of little Jack and baby Peter in the
manger—
a selfie with Jesus.
St. Joseph will look better
if he is back-grounded
by that family picnic picture—
the one with little Isabel picking her nose.
The sheep, the ox, and the donkey
will welcome your pets.

Get everyone in.
Incarnation means
the sacred can surprise us
through the people and events
of our ordinary life,
a life always more than we know.



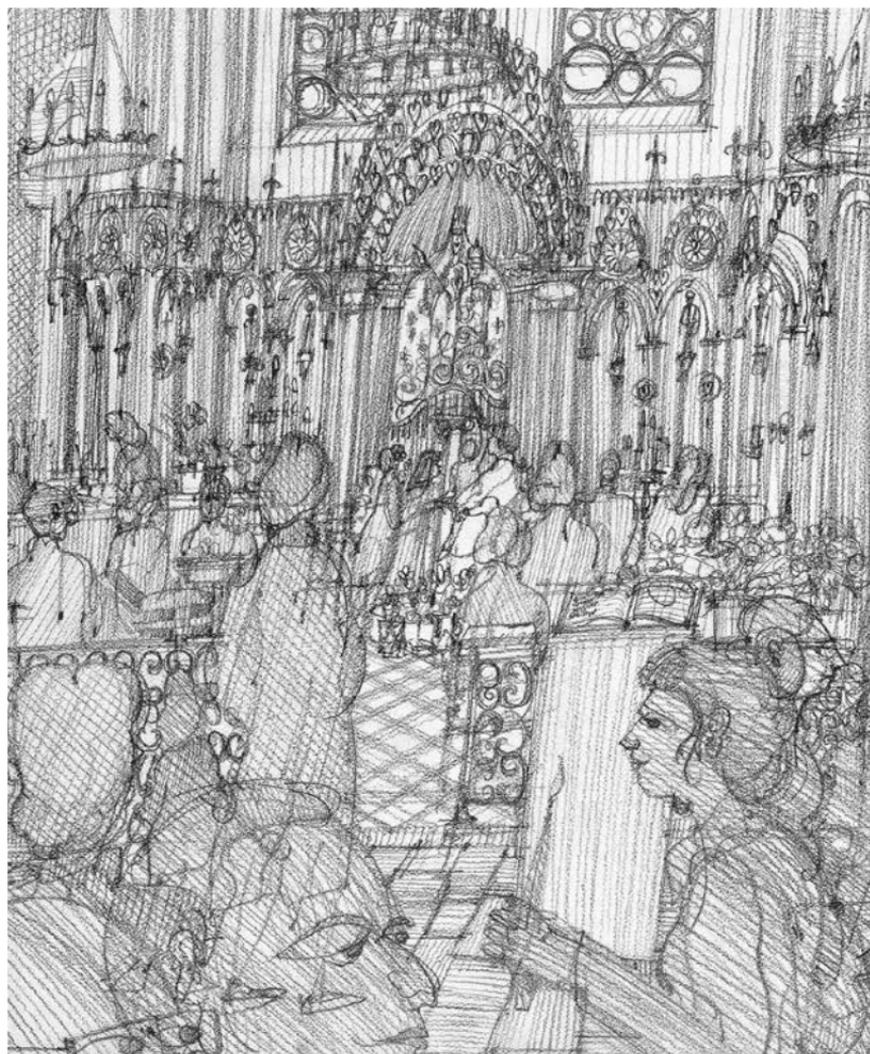


Crèche Characters Ask Questions

The Wise Men

They call us Wise Men
but we are not smart in the usual ways.
We cannot make a chair.
Our soups are regrettable.
We forget important facts.
How long, again,
can camels go without water?

Big pictures rouse us—
how all things are held together
even as they look apart,
how an unseen logic directs
apparently random events.
For us, nothing is as it seems.
Appearance is not truth.



Crèche Characters Ask Questions

The Child in the Manger

My Son is too young to speak.
So I will say a few words
to help you place him
at the center of your crèche
and, as you do it, allow him
to place himself in the center of you.

How many have I courted
in dreams and deserts
only to be forgotten
in the demands of day?
They put me on a throne,
so you must kneel.
They say I withhold blessings,
so you must beg.
They claim I punish,
so you must be afraid.