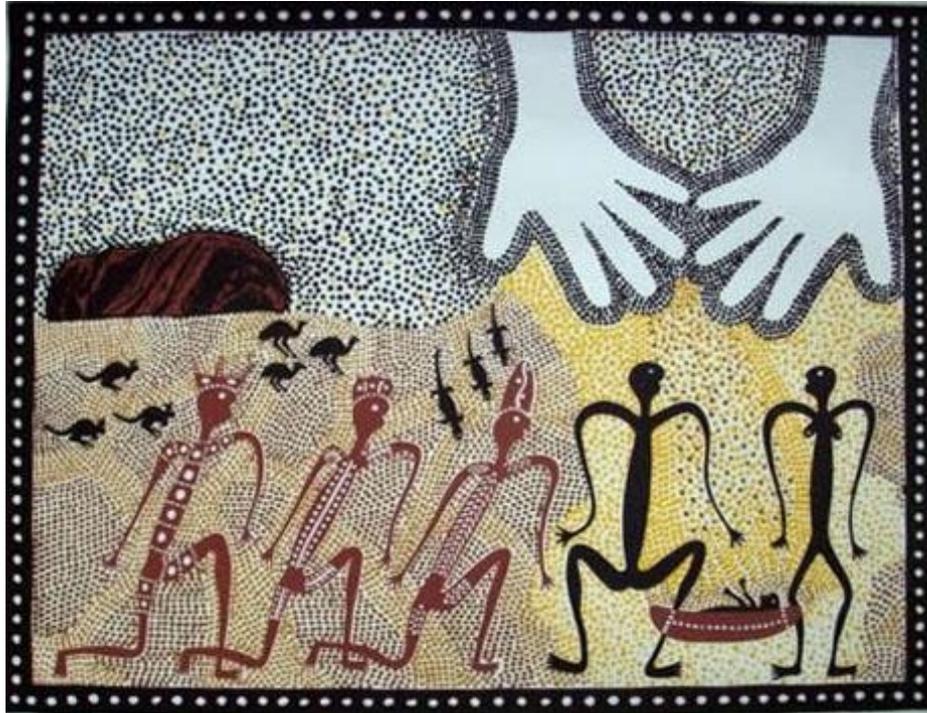


All pictures used are from *The Art of Advent* by Jane Williams. All poems are from *haphazard by starlight* by Janet Morley. Feel free to use these Advent reflections for house groups, for your own personal devotions, or not at all!

Dreamtime Birth by Greg Weatherby



This painting of the Nativity combines the birth of Jesus with aboriginal beliefs about the sacredness of the universe. “The hands can be seen as a depiction of the universal sense of gratitude at the provision of life, both at the beginning of all things and daily, in each new birth.”

As this painting gives us a different perspective on the birth of Jesus, so does the following poem, suggesting as it does that God not only comes as a weak, defenceless child who needs humans to care for it, but that God is ignorant, innocent and defenceless like a lamb, which humanity must protect before it can give its gifts of milk and wool. Or as Neil McGregor says in his book *Living with the Gods* ideals of the divine cannot work in the world without daily human attention, in the way Parsi’s tend the sacred fire daily, or a baby needs constant care – it cannot survive alone.

Agnus Dei by Denise Levertov

Given that lambs
are infant sheep, that sheep
are afraid and foolish, and lack
the means of self-protection, having
neither rage nor claws,
venom nor cunning,
what then
is this ‘Lamb of God’?

This pretty creature, vigorous
to nuzzle at milky dugs,
woolbearer, bleater,
leaper in air for delight of being, who finds in astonishment

four legs to land on, the grass
all it knows of the world?

With whom we would like to play,
whom we'd lead with ribbons, but may not bring
into our houses because
it would soil the floor with its droppings?

What terror lies concealed
in strangest words, *O lamb*
of God that taketh away
the Sins of the World: an innocence
smelling of ignorance
born in bloody snowdrifts,
licked by forebearing
dogs more intelligent than its entire flock put together?

God then,
encompassing all things, is
defenceless? Omnipotence
has been tossed away, reduced
to a wisp of damp wool?

And we
frightened, bored, wanting
only to sleep till catastrophe
has raged, clashed, seethed and gone by without us,
wanting then
to awaken in quietude without remembrance of agony,

we who in shamefaced private hope
had looked to be plucked from fire and given
a bliss we deserved for having imagined it,

is it implied that we
must protect this perversely weak
animal, whose muzzle's nudgings
suppose there is milk to be found in us?
Must hold to our icy hearts
A shivering God?

*

So be it.

Come, rag of pungent
quiverings,

dim star.

Let's try
if something human still
can shield you,
spark
of remote light.