

Ave Maria

Here it comes again...
the tumbling words of that story:
a virgin shall conceive, the heavens
will twinkle and earth's crust will be rocked
by a baby. I'll confess it: I dig in the rubble
of these familiar words, but can't find
the mystery; my heart does not flip
in awe. Today, even the magnificent
reads like scraps
of an aging theology.
As I drive down Main Street
through gray slush on a gray day,
it all seems absurd, unless filed
away with the likes of Cinderella,
Snow White, and their Princes
with impeccable dramatic timing. This wide-eyed
girl chats with a light-beaming angel
whose lessons on the birds and the bees
would make a health teacher scoff;
meanwhile stacks of papers grow on my desk,
house hasn't been cleaned in weeks,
and this year (again) we surely won't find time
to write a Christmas letter.

Speak to me, Mary, as more than
a fairy God-mother. Break through
the years that separate your face
from my car wheels spinning,
spinning over too many miles of road.
Tell me you cried in fear
when you felt the life rooting in you,
that Bethlehem was too far away
and so you griped at Joseph
when he made a wrong turn,
griped again at his patronizing apology,
and twitched with anger
as you tried to sleep blanketed
by the thick smell of animal dung.
For a moment, Mary, make yourself real,
so that I might grasp the timeless wisdom
you ensconce like a pearl—that lingering
beneath the surface of all our weary skins,
murmurs the breath of God,
waiting to leak from our bodies into this world
if only we give our tired consent.

—Suzanne Ehst, advent 2004