

Welcome to the Fourth Millennium

Ten centimeters to the left
is the Egyptian exile, beyond that

the Tower of Babel, beyond that
a black wall of flood.
Continue and you will reach God's great

contraction into himself when he flung out
worlds like a string of vowels
sprouting from his spoken mind,

when he sealed the cracked lips of chaos
so that he could pull heaven
and earth out of his belly and wrap

time's long neck around them. Funny
how events weigh nothing spread
out like this, the kingdom of the Messiah

is a small yellow box to the far right,
while the ten tribes float in bubbles
of exile as empire after empire destroys

itself underneath. Here is the year 3700—
the Herodian dynasty is the same
color blue as the Hasmonean kings

and Bar Kokhba just a dip in the road
to the Byzantines. The British
Mandate is bright red like the Crusaders,

like the Romans, like the blush of a common
era or a bleeding apple seed.

History in retrospect always behaves

and it is quiet as the years line up

flat and obedient,

proceeding to the end of days until

there are no more days and time loses

its shape to drop off like ripe

fruit that no one needs to pick anymore.

It Takes Thirty Days

It takes thirty days to break a habit or fill
a laboratory dish with bacteria.

It takes thirty days for a goose to hatch,
or a rabbit or a dwarf hamster or a red kangaroo.

It takes thirty days to count from one
to one million, to process a credit card

application, or to teach a parrot to talk.
And it took almost thirty days

for the baby's belly to turn black,
for his breath to leave its orbit and his heart

to become a broken line. There are rules
for mourning: cracked eggs and lentils

whose shape promises continuity. A tear
over your left side that you can pin up or not.

You must sit low enough to touch the ground
and put scarves over the mirrors to hide

your face from yourself. But none of this
will happen if the baby is less than thirty days old.

I saw the nurses wrap a blanket over his head
and lay a sign on it. I saw the social worker

putting her face on tight. When a baby lives less
than thirty days there are no rules. No one

tells you what to do. There is no burial site,
no speeches, no basket of psalms to place the soul

into. No one wants to leave the waiting room
with its florescent lights and anonymity,

where we discussed who would be called
Safta or Grandma or Nana, where we begged

God to save the baby, then begged God to take him.
They have sent his body to a field where all

the boys are named Adam. We are not allowed
to go there. We go home instead.

I envy the nieces and nephews, the neighbors,
the young girls pushing strollers.

I hate the phone calls. I hate the long pauses.
It takes thirty days for robins to leave their nest,

or for the bank to release your escrow. It takes
thirty days for the moon to promise itself

to one month after another. It takes thirty days
for us to be breathed into this world and grabbed

by its fist. Before that we slip innocent through its fingers,
uncertain as a wish, a glance, a whisper, a passing kiss.

The wind in the fig tree quiets when they speak

The mothers say the murmur of the universe
is the sound that water makes while it waits
for chaos to subside,
for air to emerge from absence, breath
inside a moving body.

The mothers teach the alphabet to smaller letters,
they shade the vowels with their round necks,
they give birth to word after word until the world
is humming with their offspring.

When the hissing starts the mothers cry
and their tears put out the unspoken.
The mothers say *We are the first, but not the last.*

They wind their hair into ropes so that thoughts can climb up
asking for their names.
They sing to them about the foundation and its twenty-two bones,
how creation weighs the palm and a tongue is balanced between them.

Hush, hush, they rock the smooth, cold light,
let it play with water
and fire until it grows
into hours, then months, then seasons that shiver
or burn depending
upon the shape of the letters that have been assigned to them.