



Jordan River  
Anthology

poems by Bob Hostetler

*Their names are not known.  
But they crossed paths with Jesus.  
And they still have something to say.*

# *Jordan River Anthology*

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The rabbis in the Temple.

The wedding guest at Cana.

The upper room servant.

The boy whose lunch fed five thousand people.

The mother of Judas.

We know them only as nameless characters in the crowded days of Jesus' life. Some are mentioned in the Bible. Others, while never mentioned, may be inferred, such as the census taker at Bethlehem.

*Jordan River Anthology*, in the tradition of Edgar Lee Masters's classic, *Spoon River Anthology*, is a collection of brief poetic monologues which present varying, sometimes conflicting, views of Jesus as seen through the eyes of his contemporaries. The ninety-three entertaining and thought-provoking poems of this volume offer fresh perspectives on the Gospels...and on their central character, Jesus of Nazareth.

Bob Hostetler's poetry has appeared in many publications, including *The War Cry*, *Writer's Digest*, *Broken Streets*, *Purpose*, *Grit*, and others. His books include the award-winning *Don't Check Your Brains at the Door*, and *The Bone Box* (a novel).

*The Carpenter's Mother*

I could only shake my head.  
Midway through the engagement  
    something went wrong.  
But that mule-headed man  
    would not listen to reason:  
"The law says, Joseph, the law says.  
The shame would kill her anyway.  
Stoning will be merciful.  
It happens all the time, Joseph.  
Think of the family, son, think of our name.  
Put her out, Joseph.  
You must at least put her out  
Or you are no son of mine."  
But he only shook his head.

*The Caravanserai Guest*

Little more than girl, she  
entered with her husband the  
caravanserai courtyard,  
the cacophonous crowd of travelers;  
wide her weary eyes at  
raucous laughter, vulgar whispers,  
bleating and stamping  
of beasts and men.

Under awning's faded stripes  
folding, unfolding hands  
on her round belly  
I offered my chair  
and she rested a while.

## *The Midwife*

She lay on his woolen cloak  
folded back over her legs  
in the small, dark cave,  
warmer than most,  
and the man had filled a  
stone manger with straw.

The girl was frightened  
but didn't want the husband to know.  
He, frightened himself,  
didn't want the girl to know.  
I, frightened for them both,  
couldn't let either know.

The girl clamped his arm  
when pain seared her form.  
I tore a length of cloth  
and balled it in her mouth  
to prevent her tongue  
from being bitten off.

The wailing life poured out at length,  
the boy lay loudly, indignantly on rough cloth  
til I neatly cut the pulsing cord,  
bathed him, rubbed him down with salt,  
wrapped him, placed him in his  
mother's arms and said goodnight.

## *The Shepherd*

The sky ripped open that night,  
and gave birth to angels  
who told us of another birth,  
making noise enough to wake the whole city.  
The city slept on,  
but we found the newborn.

He slept, too,  
while we wondered  
at all the trouble heaven went to  
for a little baby.

## *The Silent Shepherd*

The others, on the way back,  
couldn't stop carrying on  
about the angels, their song,  
and who was first to find  
the one the angels announced  
lying in a rude cave,  
with mother and father  
a few animals  
and a manger-bed of hay.

I kept quiet the whole time,  
apparently the only one disappointed.  
The baby wasn't at all  
the king I had in mind.



*The Census Taker*

One man.

One woman.

One child.

So they

were to me.

No more.

## *Magus*

A swaddled paradox awaited us.  
A bundled mystery to end our quest  
When all our kingly entourage arrived  
At end of many months' long journey west.

The story no one seems to wish to tell  
Is how when first we found the promised  
sight  
We balked. And only after many words,  
Would leave convinced that we had sought  
aright.

## *The Infant Killer*

Hateful duty; no battle cry  
ever froze my blood  
like the mournful mother-wails  
when infant cries were cut.  
I had my orders.  
I could not leave until the  
babies' bloody gurglings stopped.  
No explanation  
was given us, but some said  
we hunted a new-cradled king,  
a pretender to Herod's throne.  
He's dead now, of course,  
whoever he was.  
Pity. No king could be worse  
Than he who made me murder babies.

## *The Egyptian*

The Jew, the boy, so suddenly halted  
I nearly rammed him through the statue.

He stood, stone still, and studied there  
a nude Apollo cast in bronze  
with Roman head and human form.  
I almost passed to leave him there,

but stayed, arrested, magnetized  
(as flames will hold and hypnotize)

by this young boy, still but a child,  
intensity drawn across his face,  
there etched with more artistic lines  
than earthly sculptor ever traced.

The boy stood back as men will do  
When taking the measure of a foe.

*The Neighbor*

The little one had been  
    stomping among brambles  
and before long, as I watched,  
    came running with bloody palm.  
While the mother sought to still  
    his childish cries,  
an unwarranted pale bleached her face.  
And I thought, my word,  
    it's only a thorn.

## *The Customer*

Woodworkers, builders, craftsmen in stone,  
in the shop next the smith,  
the front room of a home,  
with plumbline to measure, plane to make smooth,  
midst curlings and shavings of soft-scented wood,  
knotted and grained, olivewood, oak,  
with bow drill and bit, wood mallet and awl  
to mold table and chair, threshing-board, plow,  
winnowing fork, yoke, a child's handhewn toy:

sweat-streamed, leather-wrapped,  
side by side they stood  
with ax and adz to chisel and chip  
to hammer, scrape, grind,  
file and sand and polish the wood,  
till their craftsmanship shone  
and their work pronounced good.