

## Left Behind?

J. BARRIE SHEPHERD

And are they in the right then, after all,  
so that this faith we claim to share  
revolves around who's lost and who is found,  
a chosen few who gain the cherished kingdom,  
and the rejected vast majority whose teeth  
will gnash in harsh, unending agony?

Was this gentle babe, whose birth  
this season hymns in sweetest melody,  
merely an enigmatic preview to that One  
whose bloody sword of judgment sweeps  
a universe of terror stricken souls  
into a place of torment never to be relieved?

Or dare we yet—despite these cruelest times—  
believe those fragments, glimpses of a God  
who weeps as every parent weeps,  
yearns from a deep, eternal tenderness,  
and will not rest till every child is gathered  
in the calm expectant hush of Christmas Eve?

[J. Barrie Shepherd, before retiring, served as head of staff at The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York and also at The Swarthmore Presbyterian Church. He is the author of twelve books, hundreds of published poems, and has delivered the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale and the William Belden Noble Lecture at Harvard.]