Week 1

To Know the Dark
By Wendell Berry

To go in the dark with a light is to
know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go
without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms
and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark
wings.

Week 2

The Peace of Wild Things
By Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in
me
and I wake in the night at the least
sound
in fear of what my life and my
children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood
drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and
the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of
still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind
stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and
am free.

Week 3

Slowly, slowly, they return
By Wendell Berry

Slowly, slowly, they return
To the small woodland let alone:
Great trees, outspreading and
upright,
Apostles of the living light.
Patient as stars, they build in air
Tier after tier a timbered choir,
Stout beams upholding weightless
grace
Of song, a blessing on this place.
They stand in waiting all around,
Uprisings of their native ground,
Downcomings of the distant light;
They are the advent they await.
Receiving sun and giving shade,
Their life's a benefaction made,
And is a benediction said
Over the living and the dead.
In fall their brightened leaves,
released,
Fly down the wind, and we are
pleased
To walk on radiance, amazed.
O light come down to earth, be
praised!

Week 4

A young man leaving home
By Wendell Berry

A young man leaving home
For long years to be gone
Might fall asleep and dream,
His head upon a stone.
A stair appears that bends
In spiral toward the light,
The bright Orb where it ends,
Though he sleeps through the night.

Darkened, below the stars,
Angels in constant motion
Walk up and down the stairs.
Delight and clear devotion

Make graceful all they do.
The light and dark are bound,
Heaven to all below,
Bright stair and stony ground

Inn one light joined. In sleep
The dreamer wakes. He sees
Above the stars the deep
Of heaven opened. Is

He living, then, his part
Of Heaven's earthly life?
And what shall be the art
By which this sight can live?

Darkened upon the earth,
He fills with light, is made
A witness to high Truth
And so a many afraid.

His land – this meager sod,
These stones, this low estate –
Is the household of God.
And it is Heaven's gate

Week 5 (Christmas Eve)

Remembering that it happened once
By Wendell Berry

Remembering that it happened
once,
We cannot turn away the thought,
As we go out, cold, to our barns
Toward the long night's end, that
we
Ourselves are living in the world
It happened in when it first
happened,
That we ourselves, opening a stall
(A latch thrown open countless
times
Before), might find them breathing
there,
Foreknown: the Child bedded in
straw,
The mother kneeling over Him,
The husband standing in belief
He scarcely can believe, in light
That lights them from no source we
see,
An April morning's light, the air
Around them joyful as a choir.
We stand with one hand on the
door,
Looking into another world
That is this world, the pale daylight
Coming just as before, our chores
To do, the cattle all awake,
Our own frozen breath hanging
In front of us; and we are here
As we have never been before,
Sighted as not before, our place
Holy, although we knew it not.

The Birth (Near Port William)
By Wendell Berry

They were into the lambing, up late.
Talking and smoking around their lantern,
they squatted in the barn door, left open
so the quiet of the winter night
diminished what they said. The chill
had begun to sink into their clothes.
Now and then they raised their hands
to breathe on them. The youngest one
yawned and shivered.

"Damn," he said,
"I'd like to be asleep. I'd like to be
curled up in a warm nest like an old
groundhog, and sleep till spring."

"When I was your age, Billy, it wasn't
sleep I thought about," Uncle Stanley said.
"Last few years here I've took to sleeping."

And Raymond said: "To sleep till spring
you'd have to have a trust in things
the way animals do. Been a long time,
I reckon, since people felt safe enough
to sleep more than a night. You might
wake up someplace you didn't go to sleep at."

They hushed awhile, as if to let the dark
brood on what they had said.
Behind them
a sheep stirred in the bedding and coughed.
It was getting close to midnight.
Later they would move back along the row
of penned ewes, making sure the newborn
lambs were well dried, and had sucked,
and then they would go home cold to bed.
The barn stood between the ridgetop
and the woods along the bluff.
Below
was the valley floor and the river
they could not see. They could hear
the wind dragging its underside
through the bare branches of the woods.
And suddenly the wind began to carry
a low singing. They looked across
the lantern at each other's eyes
and saw they all had heard. They stood,
their huge shadows rising up around them.
The night had changed. They were already
on their way — dry leaves underfoot

and mud under the leaves — to another barn
on down along the woods' edge,
an old stripping room, where by the light
of the open stove door they saw the man,
and then the woman and the child
lying on a bed of straw on the dirt floor.

"Well, look a there," the old man said.
"First time this ever happened here."

And Billy, looking, and looking away,
said: "Howdy. Howdy. Bad night."

And Raymond said: "There's a first time, they say, for everything."

And that,

he thought, was as reassuring as anything
was likely to be, and as he needed it to be.
They did what they could. Not much.
They brought a piece of rug and some sacks
to ease the hard bed a little, and one
wedged three dollar bills into a crack
in the wall in a noticeable place.

And they stayed on, looking, looking away,
until finally the man said they were well
enough off, and should be left alone.
They went back to their sheep. For a while
longer they squatted by their lantern
and talked, tired, wanting sleep, yet stirred
by wonder — old Stanley too, though he would not
say so.

"Don't make no difference," he said
"They'll have 'em anywhere. Looks like a man
would have a right to be born in bed, if not
die there, but he don't."

"But you heard

that singing in the wind," Billy said.
"What about that?"

"Ghosts. They do that way."

"Not that way."

"Scared him, it did."

The old man laughed. "We'll have to hold

his damn hand for him, and lead
him home."

"It don't even bother you," Billy
said.
"You go right on just the same. But
you heard."

"Now that I'm old I sleep in the
dark.
That ain't what I used to do in it. I
heard
something."

"You heard a good deal
more

than you'll understand," Raymond
said,
"or him or me either."

They looked at him.

He had, they knew, a talent for
unreasonable
belief. He could believe in
tomorrow
before it became today — a human
enough
failing, and they were tolerant.

He said:

"It's the old ground trying it again.
Solstice, seeding and birth — it
never
gets enough. It wants the birth of a
man
to bring together sky and earth, like
a stalk
of corn. It's not death that makes
the dead
rise out of the ground, but
something alive
straining up, rooted in darkness,
like a vine.
That's what you heard. If you're in
the right mind
when it happens, it can come on
you strong;
you might hear music passing on
the wind,
or see a light where there wasn't
one before."

"Well, how do you know if it
amounts to anything?"

"You don't. It usually don't. It would
take
a long long time to ever know."

But that night

and other nights afterwards, up
late,
there was a feeling in them —
familiar
to them, but always startling in its
strength —
like the thought, on a winter night,
of the lambing ewes dry-bedded
and fed,
and the thought of the wild
creatures warm
asleep in their nests, deep
underground