Forerunner

As Isaiah foretold,  
you will be the voice of one  
crying in the wilderness:  
Clear a path for the Lord!  
Level a highway through this wasteland!

That is what the angel said to me  
as I lay by my sheep in the field.

I had gazed long into heaven  
absorbed by God’s operations,  
scarcely noticing as stars began to gather  
and join in one brilliant blaze  
like frozen lightning.

Don’t be afraid.

Father had often told how he fell by the altar,  
but I never understood  
till my own heart leapt  
like a goat at a sudden roar.

The messenger spoke his piece untroubled,  
told me who I would become.

But who am I?  
Not one anointed,  
not great like Isaiah or Elijah,  
ot a worker of miracles.

I have not so much as raised a single lamb  
from death.

I am only a boy of the desert  
who throws loud shouts across the emptiness  
like stones from David’s sling,  
warning of snakes and wolves,  
looming storms,  
wildfires in the underbrush.

—Merrijane Rice

This poem won honorable mention in the 2019 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.