

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Day, 2016

St. Barnabas

“A child has been born for us, a son given to us....To you is born this day...a Savior who is Christ the Lord.”

Trailing clouds of glory the heavenly host have once again come down to proclaim the power of God to bring life and peace to an earth worn out with the worship of too many warring gods. And to whom do the angels make this proclamation? To the humble, the lowly, the powerless. However the news may spread from there, to whatever thrones and congresses it may eventually make its way, the glory of God and the blessings of peace first embrace the poor, the weak, and the innocent.

There is a sense of reverence and awe in that scene of the shepherds on the hillside surrounded by choirs of angels. There is an aura of holiness from which radiance emanates, not unlike the glow of remembrance from our own Christmases past when we were poor and weak and innocent. We remember those radiant nights as special times, those long-ago Christmases of

childhood when hearts were open, minds innocent of care, our very selves small and vulnerable.

More special than Christmas Day itself was Christmas Eve: We wanted it to go on and on being Christmas Eve forever, to savor that magic waiting time, to hold back and spin out the golden moments just on the edge of awareness. And we want it still. Wide-eyed with wonder, full of excitement and anticipation, the faces of children are lit from within by the enchantment of goodness, the appreciation of joy, and the expectation of love. Embraced by the glory of it all, they are quite at home with angels.

As adults we each have accumulated layers of sophistication, degrees of expertise. For some of us it is hard to admit that a vision of goodness, joy, and love touches something natal, something at the root of our being, something basic to our understanding of who we are as individuals striving to be persons of faith. But still we remember what it was like to be a child at Christmas, and memory is life. At Christmas we are traveling an inner landscape, repeating a subconscious memory of hope and trust at the center of life. At Christmas we are willing to keep company with angels.

Human beings have always experienced a transcendence and mystery at the heart of existence. Music, poetry, or perhaps something in nature touches us within and lifts us momentarily beyond ourselves to the edge of awareness. Briefly we encounter something we know to be true: the sacred, a fuller, enhanced existence that will complete us. And we are innocent and child-like once more.

The image of a child-like one or even virgin is of a soul untouched by time and flesh. It is a vision of all the potentialities within ourselves that have yet to become reality. It is that part of you and me that awaits creation, that is forever pure without the taint of imperfection and inadequacy. It is the hidden part of oneself that is free of the ravages of loss and decay. It is that part of your life that proceeds from Spirit. Deep within your soul is the virgin in whom the son of God is begotten.

Could it be that there is something in the way we are made that causes us to respond to love, to trust, to goodness as an innocent child responds? Are we made, have we been created, has Someone intended us to respond to love? Recognizing the link between child-like openness and the child born in a manger, poets and writers have dramatized the birth of God in man in stories

about children. Call to memory the well-known story of Charles Tazewell entitled *The Littlest Angel*. Remember how the angels brought gifts to celebrate the birth of God on earth, gifts fit for a king? And then remember that heavenly urchin and the gifts he presented before the Blessed Infant.

There was a butterfly with golden wings, captured one bright summer day on the shining hills above Jerusalem, and a sky-blue egg from a bird's nest in the olive tree that stood to shade his mother's kitchen door. Yes, and two white stones, found on a muddy river bank, where he and his friends had played like small brown beavers, and at the bottom of the box, a limp, tooth-marked leather strap, once worn by a mongrel dog, who had died as he lived, in absolute love and infinite devotion. Remember how the littlest angel at the last moment sought to hide his humble gift and tried to run from the royal assembly but stumbled and rolled in a ball of consummate misery right to the foot of the Heavenly throne. And the voice of God spoke, saying, "Of all the gifts of all the angels, I find this small box pleases me most. Its contents are of the earth and of mankind, and my son is to be King of both." The Blessed Infant to be born for us was to be among us as one of us, the Son of God made man to be born in the humblest of circumstances. Yes, the children around us, the child within us understands.

At Christmas our souls arrive at an unsullied place. Tenderly we see that the past, present and future are linked with the eternal present. Awe-struck we sense that God is for us and God is with us. Our first and most important Christmas gift has come: an act done for love, a child given so long ago, waiting now to be born anew in your heart. Receive him now and come, let us adore him.

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