

December 24, 2015 – Christmas Eve

This Precious, Precious Night

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John 1:1-14

¹ In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. ⁴ Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. ⁵ The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. ⁶ God sent John the Baptist ⁷ to tell everyone about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. ⁸ John himself was not the light; he was only a witness to the light. ⁹ The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was going to come into the world.

¹⁰ But although the world was made through him, the world didn't recognize him when he came. ¹¹ Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted. ¹² But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. ¹³ They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan -- this rebirth comes from God.

¹⁴ So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

“Come, come raise the song on high;
for God has given His Son tonight.
Come, come and worship Him,
the Babe, the Son of Mary.”

Ever since we sang these lines from the choir cantata, I've been thinking about the nativity scene as one in which God releases his son into the world -- like a British mother sending her son to fight the Germans, praying the worst wouldn't happen, fully expecting it would. The greatest offering any parent ever makes, releasing his or her own safe child, to defend someone else's. The Cosmic Christ wasn't a child, wasn't even a human being, until becoming one, for this purpose: to rescue us.

I'll go as a baby one, God's self said to some other part of God's self. *They might listen a little longer that way*. Cosmic to human is the big step anyway, right? Beyond that, the difference between infant and adult is insignificant. I sometimes wonder if, to God, when we adults show off our best work, our cities and our systems, our climate change agreements, our peace deals, our sermons, if they don't look to God like first-grade art projects -- lumpy with all the colors bled together.

It's only sweet because it's a baby, because we've staged it with sheep and shepherds, instead of the starving and the dying, the broken and the lost. The world which had proved again it was not capable of obedience to the simplest instructions: Do good and not evil. Depend on me and not yourselves.

More than previous years I've been tuned to those who are turned off by the season -- by its commercialism, by what Garrison Keillor calls "the hullabaloo around [Jesus'] infancy by those who ignored his teachings." Every story needs a beginning. And every old story eventually needs a new beginning, in the shape of new characters, scenes, plot twists. Christ was, in the beginning. Christ's coming, at what we've named Christmas, was a new beginning. Our celebration, crooked and lumpy as it is, year after year after year after year, is our own new beginning, our start over at the same effort of obedience; to do good and not evil, to depend on God and not ourselves.

I've decided, for now at least, not to care if Christmas is mostly a made-up pagan holiday co-opted by a consumption-driven culture. The church can still use it as we please, to refocus our lives and our life together on the brokenness of this world, on God's choice to love it instead of destroy it, to love us instead of condemn us, to give us the chance to be lovely, in response to God and to one another.

The world doesn't care where Christmas came from. The world cares whether there is any cause for hope. As believers, we are beholden to them for that. -- Us. The ones gathering and reading and singing, that the Word became flesh and lived among us.

And that makes it our story to tell -- here, now, to this waiting, wanting world.

Would you pray with me?