

Christmas Day Reflection
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John 1:1-14
December 25, 2016

I've reached the point in my life when, almost every year I say, "I can't believe its time for Christmas again. I'm just not ready." I feel this way because I love the long days and warm, light-filled evenings and the ease of being outside in summer and fall.

The long dark nights of winter zap my energy and my motivation. I understand why bears hibernate!

We really don't know the date of Jesus' birth but, as Christianity developed in and around Roman culture over the first three centuries after his death, the date on which Christmas came to be celebrated was already host to two festivals related to the sun or gods associated with the sun. We humans who live in the northern hemisphere have a habit it would seem of celebrating festivals of light around the time of the winter solstice.

As much as Christmas takes me by surprise each year as my wheel of life seems to spin faster and faster, I love Christmas—both the sacred traditions and the secular traditions. I just fear that I won't be ready in time, or, if I'm more honest with myself, perhaps what I'm really feeling is the fear that there will come a year in which I won't feel in the Christmas spirit. That I, too, will become like the adults in the *Polar Express* who can't hear the ring of Santa's sleigh bell.

Christmas spirit is that magical sparkly echo of the Christmases of my childhood. The Christmases in which the adults who loved me made the magic of Christmas happen just for me to experience the joy and wonder of it all! That moment when I say to myself, "NOW it feels like Christmas!"

A moment ago I drew a distinction between the sacred and secular traditions of Christmas, but, I must admit, I really don't experience these things as two different categories. It really is all a part of Christmas for me. As I look back on it now I realize that I learned a lot about the life of faith in the way Christmas happened around me year after year.

People I loved and trusted, who were the keepers of story and the keepers of our family traditions guided me through the rites and rituals of the Christmas season until the time came that the torch was passed to me, and I began to be invited into the work of helping to make Christmas happen for others.

The Christmas after my grandmother died I was thirteen and I was pretty sure that the Christmas spirit was not going to visit me that year (with all the certainty that only a thirteen year old girl can have)!

My mother of course was determined that all of the traditions would continue—rites and rituals, cookies, Christmas fruit salad and all. I felt like I was going through the motions—opening windows on the Advent calendar, watching Christmas specials, decorating the tree, going caroling with the church choir—all of

the tasks that made Christmas, well, Christmas, but I felt no magic, no sparkle, no Christmas spirit. But the Christmas spirit did come that year, finally, unbidden and unforced the light snuck up on me in spite of myself.

Kneeling after Communion on Christmas Eve, singing "Silent Night" I felt a profound calm and quiet in my soul which I've rarely felt before or since which I can only understand as the presence of God.

In the years since that Christmas, the certainty of God's presence in my life and in our world has not been far from me. While that assurance is still very much with me, I'm living through the first time in my lifetime that I've felt fearful for the future of humanity and the future of our planet. Perhaps this is the year that not just in the sentimental sense, but in the true and profound and transcendent sense that the light will not dispel the darkness.

The Anglican scholar and author C.S. Lewis wrote his Narnia series in the years immediately after World War II. These books deal with Christian themes as much of his fiction does. He said about this series, "The Narnian books are not as much allegory as supposal. Suppose there were a Narnian world and it, like ours, needed redemption. What kind of incarnation and Passion might Christ be supposed to undergo *there*?"

Lewis supposes the incarnation of Christ as the Lion, Aslan, and the personification of evil as the White Witch. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* we encounter the Narnia under her spell where it is "always winter and never Christmas." (A supposal which is really quite genius on Lewis' part. Could anything possibly be worse for us light-loving human beings in the northern hemisphere than an eternal winter without the in-breaking of our festivals of light?)

The spell begins to lift when the Pevensie children stumble into Narnia through the back of the wardrobe, fulfilling an old rhyme that foretells that sons of Adam and daughters of Eve will be among the signs of Aslan's return.

Thinking about this story reminded me that humanity is essential to God's work in the world. That the incarnation not only happens in the midst of human ordinariness, but that it must, it can't happen without us. The God who is Emmanuel...God with Us...mysteriously...needs us. God needs us to continue Christ's mission in the world—we are the plan.

This year when I thought the Christmas spirit might not touch my soul, it did, and once again it snuck up on me unbidden and unforced.

My mother's birthday is December 11th and I really do think of it as part of the Christmas season. This year we went to hear the Motet Singers on her birthday and, as they always do, they included three carols midway through the performance as an audience sing-along.

In year's past when we've attended this concert, the audience sits and sort of mumbles its way through the sing along. This year, perhaps inspired by one of the Motets playing the organ on the first carol, the audience took to its feet. Somehow this brought us together and four part harmony emerged as the audience newly formed into a congregation drew these tunes out of our collective memories.

The second carol was Silent Night to the accompaniment of a solo guitar. Three verses were printed in the program, but the guitarist only played the first two. When she stopped playing there was a hesitation followed by collective sounds of disappointment, and then, of our own accord, the audience began to sing the third verse a cappella.

In that room, mostly filled with strangers, on a Sunday afternoon two weeks before Christmas, for a moment I felt hope and a renewal of God's promise that there is a love at work in the world in us and through us that will always overcome evil.

This love was with God and was God before the beginning of time as we know it. This love is both our comfort and our call to action in these troubled times. Just as we're called to enact God's mission of justice, compassion and reconciliation in the world. It is this primordial love that became flesh among us in Jesus the Christ and it is this love that I believe is born anew in us each year at Christmas.

Hear again this love as told to us in the poetry of John's gospel:

¹ In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

² The Word was with God in the beginning.

³ Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being.

What came into being ⁴through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

⁶ A man named John was sent from God.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light.

⁸ He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

⁹ The true light that shines on all people was coming into the world.

¹⁰ The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light, but the world didn't recognize the light.

¹¹ The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him.

¹² But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, ¹³born not from blood nor from human desire or passion, but born from God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Merry Christmas.