

Reflection for January 3, 2021

Poking Holes in the Darkness

We sing of Jesus,

a Jew,

born to a woman in poverty

in a time of upheaval and political oppression.

He knew human joy and sorrow.

So filled with the Holy Spirit was he

that in him people experienced the presence of God among them.

We sing praise to God incarnate.

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts the blessed gift of heaven.

Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts...

May the peace of the 'Babe of Bethlehem' be always with you.

Let us pray:

God of promise and light, open our eyes this morning, that we may see your light in the darkness. Open our hearts, that we may perceive your promises of justice and righteousness fulfilled in the babe of Bethlehem. May we, like the Magi, have a star to guide us on our journey quest to find the one who will truly set us free. May this time of worship bring us closer to you, that the good news of the birth of light and love will transform our lives. Amen.

Two little boys were spending the night at their grandmother's the week before Christmas. The grandmother saw them off to bed and then

retired to her bedroom, leaving the boys to say their customary bedtime prayers. The younger boy spoke first and shouted his prayer in a loud voice: “Dear God, I want a bicycle for Christmas! Amen! His older brother said, “Why are you yelling? God’s not deaf.” “No,” the younger boy replied, “but I think Grandma is!” While most of us grew up knowing that Christmas is meant to be the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the real action was sitting around the tree opening the presents. As exciting as it is to open gifts, whether they are bicycles or Barbie dolls or whatever else we’ve hinted that we want, I’ve noticed something over the years. Regardless of your age, if you have thoughtfully created or purchased a gift for someone else—a gift that is meaningful to you—there is more joy in watching others open your gift than in you opening the gifts of another.

Light shines in the darkness. The One who once shouted, “Let there be light!” came to us in Jesus. The creative power and wisdom of God that spoke all things into existence—took on flesh as an infant in Bethlehem. Rev. Adam Hamilton distinguishes between two kinds of darkness. The first is moral darkness; the second is what we might call existential darkness—situational, relational, or emotional darkness. We know the moral darkness; we see it all around us. Situational darkness is associated with grief, sadness, or despair; or the feelings of being lost or unloved. Christmas, the Incarnation of God, is God’s response to both forms of darkness, the moral and the existential. God came to us, as one of us, to bring light into our darkness.

Many believe that when Christians in the fourth century settled on a date to celebrate the birth of Jesus, they chose the date not because it was a pagan holiday, but because the heavens themselves declared at this time the truth of the gospel. The winter solstice represented astronomically what John’s Gospel proclaimed was happening spiritually in the birth of Jesus Christ. Just as darkness was defeated by

light, so in Jesus, God's light would defeat the darkness of sin and death. Light triumphs over darkness; daytime pushes back the night.

"We (Christians) believe that with all its ambiguities, this is God's world, because of Jesus Christ, who, as John's Gospel tells us, is like a light shining in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. His life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection, above all, his unconquerable love, are so overwhelmingly impressive that we confess that in him we have seen the glory of the Father, full of grace and truth. In him, something new entered the world, a life so compelling in its love and outreach to all that we accept him as the revelation of the deepest reality. It is in him that we learn what human life is about and what this world is about" (John Macquarrie). Christmas is God's gift to us—a gift of light and life, hope and grace. We are invited to bear the light, to walk in the light, and to take the light into the world. "God sent Jesus to launch a revolution of the heart that ultimately leads us to take God's light into the world. As we become children of the light, we cannot keep that light within ourselves. It is meant to spill out from us naturally and touch the lives of others. And every time it does, the light extends just a bit farther, the darkness recedes bit by bit, the kingdom of God expands, and the world is changed. It is like poking holes the darkness" (Adam Hamilton).

He who called himself the bread of life, who alone can satisfy the deepest longings of our souls, was born in the town of Bethlehem—the "House of Bread". We hunger for meaning, for joy, for hope in the face of despair. We hunger to know that we can be forgiven and start anew after things we regret. We hunger for a love that will not let us go and for life and triumph in the face of death. As Frederick Buechner expressed, "the worst thing is never the last thing." All this comes through a baby who is for us the bread of life.

Bill Cantelon