

Candlelight Celebration

Wednesday, December 24, 2008

Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting

Lisa Rubin

Let us be still in the darkness of our sacred space,
And listen to the quiet around us.
For even in the quiet, there is the gentle being with others.

Let us feel the warmth of our community,
Knowing we are not alone.
For in the quiet shadow is the glow of life within all.

Let us know in the darkness the gift each candle bears,
A small flame, a diminutive light -
Yet the wondrous gift to kindle another's glow.

Let us be in awe at this moment as we each take up the flame
And the light envelopes this room,
As hope for peace and goodwill fill this night.

Let us now and always worship together.

Reading "For So the Children Come," by Sophia Lyon Fahs

For so the children come
And so they have been coming.
Always in the same way they come
Born of the seed of man and woman.
No angels herald their beginnings.
No prophets predict their future courses.
No wise men see a star to show where to find
The babe that will save humankind.
Yet each night a child is born is a holy night,
Fathers and Mothers—sitting beside their children's cribs

Feel glory in the sight of a new life beginning.
They ask, “Where and how will this new life end?
Or will it ever end?”
Each night a child is born is a holy night—a time for singing,
A time for wondering,
A time for worshipping.

Meditation “A Christmas Prayer,” by M. Maureen Killoran

Not gold, nor myrrh, nor even frankincense
would I have for you this season,
but simple gifts, the ones that are hardest to find,
the ones that are perfect,
even for those who have everything.

I would
have for you the gift of courage,
the strength to face the gauntlets
only you can name,
and the firmness in your heart to know
that you can be a bearer of the quiet dignity
that is the human glorified.

I would
have for you the gift of connection,
the sense of standing on the hinge of time,
touching past and future
standing with certainty that you
are the point where it all comes together.

I would
have for you the gift of community,
a nucleus of love and challenge,
to convince you in your soul
that you are a source of light
in a world too long believing in the dark.

Not gold, nor myrrh, nor even frankincense,

would I have for you this season,
but simple gifts, the ones that are hardest to find,
the ones that are perfect,
even for those who have everything.

Reading “Come We Now,” by Annie Foerster

Come we now out of the darkness of our unknowing
and the dusk of our dreaming;
Come we now from far places.
Come we now into the twilight of our awakening
and the reflection of our gathering.
Come we now all together.

We bring, unilluminated, our dark caves of doubting;
We seek, unbedazzled, the clear light of understanding.
May the sparks of our joining kindle our resolve,
brighten our spirits, reflect our love,
and unshadow our days.
Come we now; enter the dawning.

Homily “Being the Story of Christmas”

Once upon a time, there lived a poor carpenter and his wife. Joseph, the man, learned that Mary, the woman had become pregnant before the time of their wedding. She explained the miraculous happening, that her pregnancy came about from an encounter with holy Spirit.

Near the time when Mary would begin labor to have the baby, Joseph took her with him to a nearby town called Bethlehem, where they could be counted in the census. While they were there, Mary’s labor began, and since the inns were all taken by the crowds that were there for the census, they were directed to a shed behind the inn. It was there that Mary delivered her baby boy, calling him Jesus. She placed him in a hay trough because it was the best they could do at the time.

Three wise men, perhaps kings, perhaps astrologers, stopped in at their shed. They explained that they had traveled for a long time, following a particular star that foretold of this birth. Jesus, they declared, would be a great spiritual person and also a great king.

It is an ancient story that has become the foundation for an entire religion. But is it true?

For me the question about this ancient Christmas story is not whether I *believe* it or not. Were there actually three magi who foretold of Jesus birth? Was the baby really placed in a manger where the animals ate their hay? Did the story actually take place in Bethlehem? There are many Christian theologians for whom questions like these are primary. What did and what did not happen *historically*?

When I read the Christmas Story in the four opening books of the Christian Scripture, I don't wonder about the *factual truth* of the story. Instead, I care more about the *meaning* of the story. The question for me is not whether I *believe in* the story as much as how I might learn to *be* the story.

I approach the story of Christmas as I might approach a dream that I've had. In the dream there are certain characters, certain places, and certain events, all of which arise from within my unconscious. One of the characters in my dream is the person of myself, and it's easy to identify with that. But the other characters are no less myself. If I have given flowers to someone in my dream, I am both the one who gives and the one who receives the flowers. How does it feel as the giver? How does it feel as the receiver/ And if I'm going to let myself fully into the meaning of the dream, I must remember that I am also the flowers. What is it to be given? What is it, to be a gift?

So it is if I am to find meaning in a fable. The fox heads home with a big chunk of meat in its mouth, and he looks at his reflection in a pool of water. He sees what he thinks is a second fox with a hunk of meat in its mouth, as well. But he thinks the hunk of meat in the reflection is bigger than his own, so he snaps out to take it away. Of course he loses the meat he had in the process. Who am I in the world as this fox? Who am I as the pool of water, as the reflection? Who am I as the chunk of meat? The richness of a story like this is that it reveals to me aspects of my own deeper self if I let it.

This involves much more than just believing or disbelieving the story. It involves the imagination. It involves *making* believe. It requires being open to new truth. I invite you now to feel what it would be like to *be* different parts of the Christmas Story.

In the story we encounter the three wise men, traveling a great distance to glimpse a new hope for their future and the future of their world. How are you those wise men? Over what dangerous ground have you come in your life to glimpse a change for the better and a

new hope for your future and the future of your world? What is it that you hope for? What is it that you wish could be born in your world now?

Mary has had an encounter with Spirit beyond her understanding. Have you ever had such an encounter? What did it feel like? How has it changed your life?

Mary is pregnant. For her there is a nine-month waiting time before the baby will be born. This is a waiting time, this season of darkness. What might be forming in you, that you will give birth to in the new year? What miraculous gestation is taking place within you, right now?

The baby is born. The new life is come. You are that baby and this is your new life. What do you long for? What are your dreams? What hope does your presence fulfill in your world? How are you the gift that this world needs?

On a silent night in Bethlehem, on the first Nowell, a babe was born who was full of light and life. Remembering the story, our own light is rekindled, our own life renewed

