

The Sunday Missive – January 15 2023 The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Hymn 542 Christ is the world's true Light

Christ is the world's true light, its Captain of salvation,
The Day-star clear and bright of every man and nation;
New life, new hope awakes, where'er men own his sway;
Freedom her bondage breaks, and night is turned to day.

In Christ all races meet, their ancient feuds forgetting,
The whole round world complete, from sunrise to its setting:
When Christ is throned as Lord, men shall forsake their fear,
To ploughshare bear the sword, to pruning-hook the spear.

One Lord, in one great Name unite us all who own thee;
Cast out our pride and shame that hinder to enthrone thee;
The world has waited long, has travailed long in pain;
To heal its ancient wrong, come, Prince of Peace, and reign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZKDzD3FArI>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp

sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.

He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God."

And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength-- he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Psalm 40

I waited patiently upon the Lord* Who stooped to me and heard my cry.

God lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay* Set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.

The Lord put a new song in my mouth* A song of praise to our God.

Many shall see, and stand in awe* And put their trust in the Lord.

Happy are they who trust in the Lord* They do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.

Great are the things you have done, O Lord my God* How great your wonders and your plans for us.

Oh, that I could make them known and tell them* But they are more than I can count.

I proclaim righteousness in the great congregation* Behold, I do not restrain my lips.

Your righteousness I have not hidden in my heart* I have spoken of your faithfulness and your deliverance

You are the Lord; do not withhold your compassion from me* Let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind-- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn 550 Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult

Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea,
Day by day his clear voice soundeth, saying, "Christian, follow me;"

Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world's golden store;
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."

In our joys and in our sorrows, days of toil and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."

Jesus calls us! By thy mercies, Savior, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience, serve and love thee best of all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyvpULYBKdU>

John 1:29-42

John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he

said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

A Stable Lamp is Lighted -- Epiphany 2A

As we move through the season called Epiphany, two thousand and more years since the events that changed the world forever, one inescapable realization we cannot but revisit is the depth of our attachment to the stories themselves. Even as they grow older in linear time, and our awareness of the quirks and inconsistencies among historical reportage, cherished legend and sacred narrative grows, the stories themselves only get more powerful in their relevance to our daily lives and their ability to influence our inner worlds. We are mysteriously and repeatedly moved by the narratives that emerged from those long-ago events.

In that vein, I want to share with you an extended image of the birth of Jesus. A friend has shared with me a book called *The Four Wise Men*, written not long ago by one Michael Tournier, about the swirl of wonder that came to light in those days. It’s just a story. Or, it’s just the story, told from the perspective of one donkey, who happened to be quartered in a stable, on a night that happened to be like no other:

“But that night, there was no question of work. Some travellers who had been turned away from the inn looked into our stable. I strongly suspected they wouldn’t leave us in peace. And sure enough, pretty soon a man and a woman came into our cozy barn.

The man was some kind of artisan. He had kicked up a big fuss, telling everyone who would listen that he had to register in Bethlehem for the census, because his family tree – twenty-seven generations no less – went back to King David himself, who had been born there. Everybody laughed, either behind his back or right in his face. He'd have had more help in finding lodging if he had mentioned the condition of his young wife, who seemed dead tired, and very pregnant besides. Taking straw from the floor, he put together a thick pallet between the ox and me and there the young woman lay down to rest.

Little by little, everybody found his place and the noise died down. Now and then the young woman moaned softly and that's how we found out her husband's name was Joseph. He comforted her as best he could, and that's how we found out her name was Mary. I don't know how many hours passed; I must have slept. When I woke up, I had a feeling that something significant was about to take place, not only in our modest shelter, but everywhere; even, so it seemed, in the sky, glittering tatters of which shone through our miserable roof. There was an air of excitement, expectation and wonder. The great silence of the longest nights of the year had fallen on the Earth and it seemed as though, for fear of breaking the silence, the Earth had stopped the flow of all its waters and the heavens were holding their breath. Even the glow worms and fireflies masked their light. Nature had given way to a sacred eternity.

Then suddenly, in less than an instant something enormous happened. An irrepressible thrill of joy traversed Heaven and Earth. There was a rustling of innumerable wings overhead. When we looked up, we could see swarms of angelic messengers rushing in all directions. The thatch over our heads was lit up by the dazzling trail of a comet. We heard the crystalline happiness of the brooks and the majestic laughter of the rivers. In the desert of Judea, swirls of sand tickled the flanks of the dunes. An ovation of song rose from the forests and mingled with the muffled

approbation of hoot owls. Even the stars themselves exulted. All nature exulted.

What had happened? Seemingly not much; hardly anything. A faint cry coming from the dark, warm pallet; a cry that could not have come from a man or a woman. It was the soft wailing of a newborn baby. Just then, a great column of light shone down in the middle of the stable: The Archangel Gabriel had arrived.

A few days later, one of those wise fellows -- the one from Africa -- who had paid enough attention to his dream not to let Herod the horrible king in on the whereabouts of this baby -- the one they were calling Jesus -- he thought about what he had witnessed, how it was he knew so well that this experience was meant for him. When they asked him: "And what did you find in Bethlehem" He eagerly replied: "An infant in the straw of a stable; but the child is none other than the incarnate God set down in the midst of poor humankind... The clouds had all dispersed and God had become visible in a child. The humblest elements of daily life -- those beasts, those implements, that stable -- bathed in eternity by a ray of light fallen from Heaven. You ask me what I found in Bethlehem. I found the image and likeness of God reconciled after such a long separation, I found the image regenerated, thanks to the rebirth of an underlying likeness.

"The child in the crib became black when I saw it in order better to welcome me, Gaspar, an African King. There's more in that than all the love stories I know. That beautiful image teaches us to become like those we love, to see with their eyes, to speak in their mother tongues, to respect them, a word that originally meant to 'look at twice.' When thus exalted, pleasure, joy and happiness fuse into love.

"If you expect another to give you pleasure or joy, does it mean that you love them? No. You love only yourself. You want them to serve your self-love. True love is the pleasure you get from another's pleasure, the joy that rises up in you at the sight of her joy, the happiness it gives you to know that he is happy. Pleasure

from pleasure, joy from joy, happiness from happiness – that is love, nothing more. That baby is God’s desire to have us experience pleasure, wholeness, purpose, fulfillment. O that I could go out into the world and do likewise to all who cross my path.”

As C.S.Lewis observed, “At that birth, there and then only in all time the myth became fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not 'a religion', nor 'a philosophy.' It is the summing up and actuality of them all.”

So, who can duly appreciate that greater Love which opens the high gates of heaven to us prodigals; most of us brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting our eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? The words *compelle intrare*, ‘compel them to come in,’ uttered by Jesus by way of inviting one and all to the great feast, have been so abused by wicked men that we shudder at them. From early centuries through medieval times and beyond, the Church leaned on a horribly twisted interpretation of *compelle intrare*, found in Luke 14:23. Governments had the right to coerce people into church. Church and state were so tied together that the former could dictate the latter use deadly force against anyone who resisted, or even objected.

“But, properly understood,” continues Lewis, the words “...plumb the depth of the Divine mercy. The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of man, and His compulsion is our liberation.” So, we absorb and give way to them; and we encounter joy. If we are paying attention, if we shut our mouths and open our eyes and ears, that birth becomes our central story, along with the saga that follows. If we take in what is there and give no thought to what might have been there or what might be somewhere else, we will realize how our formation as true and simple Christians will always be the true training for and practice of anything whatever that is good in this life. If we can look – as did the visitors from the East – upon the birth in Bethlehem and the life that followed it, not only as a stupendous cosmic miracle but also as a clear and generous opportunity for us to obtain

purpose and receive nurture, nothing less than the meaning of life will be our recompense for all the suffering of humanity.

Hymn 535 Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
And publish abroad his wonderful Name;
The Name all-victorious of Jesus extol:
His kingdom is glorious; he rules over all.

God ruleth on high, almighty to save;
And still he is nigh: his presence we have.
The great congregation his triumph shall sing,
Ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.

Salvation to God who sits on the throne!
Let all cry aloud, and honor the Son.
The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
Fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb.

Then let us adore, and give him his right:
All glory and power, all wisdom and might,
And honor and blessing, with angels above,
And thanks never-ceasing and infinite love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91PjrMRHjvs>

The Death of the Old Year

Full knee-deep lies the winter snow, and the winter winds are sighing:
Toll ye the church bell sad and slow, tread softly and speak low,
For the old year lies a-dying.

Old year you must not die; you came to us so readily,
You lived with us so steadily, old year, you shall not die.

He lieth still: he doth not move: he will not see the dawn of day.
He hath no other life above. He gave me a friend and a true truelove
And the New-year will take 'em away.

Old year you must not go; so long you have been with us,
Such joy as you have seen with us, old year, you shall not go.

He froth'd his bumpers to the brim; a jollier year we shall not see.
But tho' his eyes are waxing dim, and tho' his foes speak ill of him,
He was a friend to me.

Old year, you shall not die; we did so laugh and cry with you,
I've half a mind to die with you, old year, if you must die.

He was full of joke and jest, but all his merry quips are o'er.
To see him die across the waste his son and heir doth ride post-haste,
But he'll be dead before.

Every one for his own. The night is starry and cold, my friend,
And the New-year blithe and bold, my friend, comes up to take his own.

How hard he breathes! over the snow I heard just now the crowing cock.
The shadows flicker to and fro: the cricket chirps: the light burns low:
'Tis nearly twelve o'clock.

Shake hands, before you die. Old year, we'll dearly rue for you:
What is it we can do for you? Speak out before you die.

His face is growing sharp and thin. Alack! our friend is gone,
Close up his eyes: tie up his chin: step from the corpse, and let him in
That standeth there alone,

And waiteth at the door. There's a new foot on the floor, my friend,
And a new face at the door, my friend, a new face at the door.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson