

Christmas Eve Reflections

Wayne Waibel – 12/24/2023

It would be pretentious of me to even attempt an interpretation of the birth narrative beyond what is presented in Luke. There's no need to clarify or expand or even update the version of Christ's birth that resonates so deeply with all of us. About the only new element year in and year out is how it rests with each of us, and that's where the beauty lies.

Every year we are reminded of how God consistently and intentionally finds a way to break into the ordinary places. Because PLACE shapes how God is experienced. And depending on our frame of mind, it can mean the difference between a divine experience and an opportunity lost.

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It's no accident that the Messiah was born at exactly that time in history when all roads led to Rome. The shadow of imperial Rome encompassed a vastness unrivaled in antiquity. Caesar Augustus was considered a son of God – it was among his many titles.

While the Roman Empire was socially, politically, and militarily engaged in a movement of peace through victory or conquest, a tiny little baby was born to unmarried peasants who could do little better than provide an animal trough for a crib.

From that moment, the world would come to know a King who would achieve peace through justice; a peace no earthly king would ever achieve. The familiarity of the birth narrative often results in our completely missing some of these more profound aspects.

His first hours on earth were spent in a stable. There is no mention of a midwife to assist the young mother. A quiet, unpopulated location became His initial home. He is so the right King for us. A barn is just the kind of place that puts an exclamation point on how God is experienced.

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The appearance of Jesus went unnoticed by so many that day. Much as the brutality and injustice endured by so many in various parts of our modern world pass without notice these days. The societal and political landscape has become so littered with the debris of inhumanity we barely even acknowledge the disparity any longer.

The shepherds of Jesus' time were the marginalized of society. And yet – these were who God sought out to announce the birth of His Son. Why was that?

Because from the very beginning, Christ was born into this world to proclaim the good news to the poor. He appears to the less than perfect and less than powerful all the time!

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God functions in the midst of our lives as it happens. He doesn't set aside the perfect time. Even if things do not go as planned, new life breaks forth. Salvation through Christ carries with it both the potential and imperative to live a changed life.

There is a wonderful beauty in the ordinary that God finds so attractive. It supports the notion that God seeks us. And that seeking often finds us in the midst of political upheaval, or societal disarray, or family conflict. The work of redemption includes us – it is not merely about us.

He gave us His Son. That Son was born to deliver us from oppression and evil. He was born to humble parents on the fringe of society, and His arrival was announced to the lowest of the low. They were His people. We are His people.

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The thing about the Christmas story that resonates so strong with us is that more than anything else – God wishes us peace. Not X-boxes or bicycles or dolls or even a nice set of Lincoln Logs. What God wishes for us is peace, the component to creation that equalizes all the labor.

So, as we enjoy the pleasure of our celebrations this night and tomorrow, set aside a moment to simply experience the wonder of a loving God whose desire for our peace is so strong that He gave us His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Maybe we need to see the world and its politics differently; not as a field of heroic struggle against overwhelming force, or a prison in which humans are stoically trapped, but as a site of divine activity.

There is hope because God is already working here and there is renewal because the God who is already working is establishing a reign of justice and righteousness – even, and perhaps especially, on Christmas Eve. Amen.