

The Sunday Missive -- December 29, 2024
The First Sunday After Christmas

102 Once in Royal David's city

Once in Royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed
Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed
Mary was that mother's mild Jesus Christ, her little Child

He came down to earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all
And His shelter was a stable and His cradle was a stall
With the poor, and mean, and lowly lived on earth, our Savior holy

And through all His wondrous childhood we would honor and obey
Love and watch the lowly maiden in whose gentle arms he lay
Christian children all must be mild, obedient, good as He

For He is our childhood's pattern day by day, like us, He grew
He was little, weak, and helpless tears and smiles, like us He knew
And He feeleth for our sadness and He shareth in our gladness

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

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your
incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may
shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and
reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for
ever. Amen.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered
me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with
a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Psalm 147

How good it is to sing praises to our God! * ***How pleasant it is to honor the Lord with praise!***

Who heals the brokenhearted* ***And binds up all their wounds.***

Who counts the number of the stars* ***And calls them all by their names.***

Great is our Lord and mighty in power* ***There is no limit to God's wisdom.***

The Lord lifts up the lowly* ***But casts the wicked to the ground.***

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving* ***Make music to God upon the harp.***

Who covers the heavens with clouds* ***And prepares rain for the earth;***

Who makes grass to grow upon the mountains* ***And green plants to serve humankind.***

Who provides food for flocks and herds* ***And for the young ravens when they cry.***

God is not impressed by the might of a horse* ***And has no pleasure in the strength of a man;***

But the Lord has pleasure in those who obey* ***In those who await the gracious favour of God.***

For God has strengthened the bars of your gates* ***And has blessed your children within you.***

Galatians 3:23 - 4:7

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

78 O little town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary; and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHKORmpW4Cg>

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The Greatest Conjunction – Christmas 1C

It's good to be together. Goodness knows I will miss your company, your "inquiring and discerning hearts," and our worship together.

The extraordinary monk and theologian Richard Rohr describes how "Jesus walked, enjoyed, and suffered the entire human journey, insisting that we could and should do the same. His life exemplified the unfolding mystery in all of its stages—from a hidden, divine conception, to a regular adult life full of love and problems, punctuated by a few moments of transfiguration and enlightenment, and all leading to glorious ascension and final return. As Hebrews 4:15 states, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, we have one who was like us in every way, experienced every temptation, and never backtracked." Jesus' life, the worldly onset of which brings us together today, demonstrates that we don't need to be afraid of the depths and breadths of our own lives, of what this world offers us or asks of us. We are shown how becoming intimate with our own experiences, learning from them, and allowing ourselves to descend to the depth of things, even our mistakes, before we try too quickly to transcend everything is life fully lived.

Lenny, in her homilies has also mentioned the proclivity we moderns have for finding provable scientific explanations for the wonders of the Christmas narrative, for example. This may be very informative on an intellectual level, but of course it misses the message, the beauty and the wonderment of the story. Just as it was with the haggis we shared, once upon a time on Scottish Night, knowing exactly what goes into this story detracts mightily from its delicious impact. Some may relate to that analogy more than others.

But, if we welcome such scientific information as "People of The Book," that is, as people whose love for the stories is not at all contingent on their historical accuracy, we can have the best of both realms. We can have our *galette des rois* and eat it too. Astronomers tell us of a rarity called a "Greatest Conjunction," where Jupiter and Saturn are very close together and the Sun is so uninterfering that they are strangely huge and magnificent when seen from the Earth at night. The Star of Bethlehem is thought by some to have been one of these Greatest Conjunctions. One occurred in the year 7 BCE and would have been

visible from the Levant -- Mesopotamia and Southwest Asia, the area east of Palestine -- in the western Sky late at night.

Some have even rashly claimed it was something called an “[Occultation](#)” of Saturn by Jupiter, where the two planets appear to merge into a single glowing sphere. According to current calculations however, such an event has not occurred within recorded history. If you are bucket listing, by the way, the next occultation of Saturn by Jupiter is expected to take place in 7541, at which point, Earthlings, if there still are such creatures, will hopefully have stopped arguing about this, and many other subjects.

During the Greatest Conjunction that did occur in 7 BC, the minimum observable distance between Jupiter and Saturn was around 1 degree, which is just twice the [Moon](#)'s diameter, so the Magi probably thought they were seeing double; but that didn't make it into the story. So many mysterious potions come from the East, the gossellers didn't want to cast any doubt on the veracity of the three wise fellows' vision and, as we know, De Nile is not just a river in Egypt.

We would do well to pay attention to scientific discoveries of astronomers – likewise climatologists, epidemiologists, economists, etc. Scientists explore the world that we know to be God's creation, so it makes sense for us to seek coherence between the two realms of consideration. Yes, it raises the question of authority: What takes precedence over what? The answer is neither. Where we mistake ourselves is in assuming conflict between the two; we err in assuming science and religion to be answering the same questions.

Instead, we must learn to look more closely at our sacred texts and ask: If they aren't trying to teach us science, what else they are trying to do? What are the stories in the Torah and The Gospels conveying about cosmos and covenant and commitment? What affect do the Psalms have on our spirits? What is in the histories and the words of the prophets about justice and war and international relations that we could use to become better nations?

As for the New Testament, Evelyn Underhill writes, “The birth of Christ in our souls is for a purpose beyond ourselves: it is because God's manifestation in the world must be through us. Every Christian is, as it

were, part of the dust-laden air which shall radiate the glowing epiphany of God; shall catch and reflect God's golden light."

Mark Richardson: "The whole world, not just the Church, is the theater of God's saving work. We have to see ourselves as a kind of servant and sacramental presence, trusting that God's purpose is the completion and fulfilment of the world, drawing it ever more deeply into the divine life. If we want to be good at being this presence, we'd better study and learn to know the world. The more we do that, the more attuned we will be to God."

This is what Paul is trying to tell the Ephesians when he writes: "According to his good pleasure set forth in Christ, with all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of his will, a plan for the fullness of time: to gather up all things on heaven and on earth into himself. And in Christ we too have inherited a vocation: that we might live for the praise of God's glory."

Likewise, in our passage today from John's Gospel we hear, "The Word became flesh and made a dwelling among us; we have seen God's glory." Which is to say that the world we live in is the glorious dwelling place of God. She must be awfully frustrated at our pathological mistreatment of it; of our breathtaking denial and defiance of truth.

We could instead accept and know that God will enter our own situations of fear and suffering, no matter what they are. We have the guarantee of God's transforming power in our individual lives and in our families. The Israelites in our stories are going through the process of discovering these truths together. It is a process which comprises all of life and promises to continue even beyond death.

In his *Divine Dawning*, Thomas Aquinas writes:

Light of lights! All gloom dispelling, thou didst come to make thy
dwelling here within our world of sight.
Lord, in pity and in power, thou didst in our darkest hour
rend the clouds and show thy light.

We give thanks for this assurance, this gloom-dispelling light, this central element of our existence, our core, our fundament, our hope. And we celebrate this phenomenon with the families in whose midst

we discover and re-enact the wondrous gift of love: with families of faith like this one, also with our families of origin and our families of choice -- if they are working! So too, other kinds of families are cause for the celebration of hope that the scriptures describe: our circles of friends, support groups, families of service: caregiving, care-accepting, philanthropy, charity, public service, our schoolmates and playmates and workmates. Each of these circles in which we move is a family with the potential for love and hope that surpasses even death.

I recently attended my 50th high school reunion, and something almost magical seemed to happen. There was a feeling at the party: part excitement, part wistfulness, part wonderment at the privilege we have had to enjoy each other's company over the years. Somehow the 50th held a sublime position between growing up -- all together crammed into the auditorium and champing at our various bits -- between that and growing old: all spread out and falling apart, but still together in spirit. Ten of our number had died, out of 90, the most recent: Skip, with his big mop of curls, his superior mind, his athleticism, his scary preacher of a Dad, his ready smile; Skip – Muscoe was his real name, and he used it in adult life -- he always made me stop and think, "Now what is he up to? Maybe I'd better try to get in on that." I became awfully grateful for the privilege of being on the ride of life with those people, just as I am with you. We seem to give each other hope.

Here's e e cummings:

i thank You God for most this amazing day:

for the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of sky;

and for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes

i who have died am alive again today, and this is the sun's birthday;

this is the birth day of life and love and wings:

and of the gay great happening illimitably earth

how should tasting touching hearing seeing breathing any-lifted from
the no of all nothing-human merely being doubt unimagably You?

now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are
opened.

The Ending of a Pastoral Relationship

Dearly beloved friends, since the 13th day of March, 2013, when I arrived to become rector of St. Peter's by the Sea, I have, with God's help and to the best of my abilities, exercised this trust, accepting its privileges and responsibilities. After prayerful and careful consideration, it now seems to me that it is time for me to leave this charge, and I publicly state that my tenure as rector of ends this day.

{The Minister present to the warden the keys}

Let us pray together.

O God, you have bound us together for a time as pastor and people to work for the advancement of your kingdom in this place: We give you humble and hearty thanks for the ministry which we have shared in these years now past.

Silence

We thank you for your patience with us despite our blindness and slowness of heart. We thank you for your forgiveness and mercy in the face of our failures and the joy we have felt together in our successes.

Silence

Especially we thank you for your never-failing presence with us through these years, and for the deeper knowledge of you and of each other which we have attained in each other's company.

Silence

We thank you for those who have been joined to this part of Christ's family through baptism. We thank you for opening our hearts and minds again and again to your Word, and for feeding us abundantly with the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of your Son.

Silence

Now, we pray, be with those who leave and with us who stay; and grant that all of us, by drawing ever nearer to you, may always be close to each other in the communion of your saints. All this we ask for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Peace

455 O Love of God how strong and true

O Love of God, how strong and true, eternal and yet ever new;
Uncomprehended and unbought, beyond all knowledge and all
thought.

O wide-embracing, wondrous Love, we read thee in the sky above;
We read thee in the earth below, in seas that swell and streams that
flow.

We read thee best in him who came to bear for us the cross of shame,
Sent by the Father from on high, our life to live, our death to die.

We read thy power to bless and save e'en in the darkness of the grave;
Still more in resurrection light we read the fullness of thy might.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxluyC3JdCQ>