

2 Christmas
January 3, 2021

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,
 taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
 AMEN**

Well, I could imagine that none of us thought we would still not all be together here by this second Sunday of Christmas. That realization inspired me to find a poem that had been meaningful to me in the past.

W.H. Auden wrote a poem called "For the Time Being." It is a poem about this time of the year...after all the hoopla of Christmas. In it he profoundly captured the mood of so many when he wrote: "Well, /// so that is that." After all of the anticipation and all of the celebration, the spirit of the holiday season is already starting to burn off like the morning fog, and it is time to turn back to a hundred other details...the daily things of ordinary life. Time to straighten up the house. Time to get back to work. We've gotten through Christmas once again, perhaps in spite of ourselves. In Auden's words: "Maybe we've stayed up too late, eaten too much, spent too much, expected the wrong things, tried, probably unsuccessfully, to love ALL of our relatives, and in general, maybe just tried too hard about all of that."

But it's over now. That's that. Whatever it was, that's it. That is that! But, oh my, what a shame if in all our planning, we have neglected to celebrate! Or as Auden put it: "Once again, as in previous years, we have seen the actual //// Vision of Love ///// and have failed to do more than entertain it as an agreeable possibility." ///// So, it's back to the old world we left behind for a bit, at Christmas time....and perhaps *that* leaves us feeling a bit weary, a bit unsatisfied. And yet that *glimpse* of how it *could* be will not entirely leave us. We almost wish it would. Auden concludes his poem with these words: "To those who have truly seen the Child, however dimly, however incredulously, the Time Being IS, in a sense, the most TRYING Time of all."

Because that glimpse of the Holy, that sense of pure Love, that Vision keeps haunting us. The love, the joy, the peace of that Holy Night continues to catch hold of us and our thoughts: the love, the joy, the peace which we knew in our hearts as we went to Bethlehem to see what had come to pass. Somehow, we still long to KNOW it...right in the midst of our old routines, right where we are, in the midst of a world that Christmas doesn't seem to have changed at all. Right where we are, maybe hurting, wondering as we wander under the blue sky.

And yet...it was precisely into such a world that Christ was born. God's love came into a world full of discord and hate, including the very personal hate that Herod had. The peace of Christ came into a world ruled by a sword. His joy came into a world all too well acquainted with grief. We sentimentalize the manger scene, but in reality, it was rough, crude, dirty. Yet THERE, //// LOVE came with joy and peace.

The Word...the very essence of God, was made flesh...was made like us...like you and me...and not some ethereal spirit. The reality of the Incarnation is that God loved us so much that he became One of Us in order to live among us. It was into the real world, our world //// that he came, as a real human being. And it is into the real world, with all its compromise, with all that depresses us, that he still comes even during this post-Christmas time. For we must move back into our workaday world with its challenges of all kinds. And it is there that the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us...right there that we can know within our hearts that God has BLESSED US in Christ...And THAT makes all the difference.

Not only is Christmas behind us; so too, is New Year's Day. And how many of our proud and daring and hopeful New Year's resolutions have already been broken? Or will be before too long? You know the old line: "This is the first day of the rest of your life" and all the promises of fresh starts and new beginnings it conjures up. ////////////// But then there is the cartoon of the frazzled man who comes home after a very long, discouraging day, hangs up his coat and says to his wife, "Well, the first day of the rest of my life was Rotten."

And this may be especially true if we HAVE taken the vision of Christ into our days and truly seek to bring THAT love, joy, and peace into the midst of everyday pressures, of everyday priorities. /////// As our poet, Auden said... "To those who have seen the Christ Child, the *Time Being* is the most trying time of all." ---- "To those who have seen the Christ Child, the *Time Being* is the most trying time of all." BUT /////// it is in this *Time Being*, this right here and now, /////// with all its frustrations, with all its discouragement, that God is made flesh and dwells among us. And THAT keeps us trying in these Most TRYING of times. //// God is very close to us. . . right where we are now. God is a pilgrim with us on our paths. God shares our joys //// sure, /// but certainly our suffering. God lives our life with us/within us. God in Jesus shares our lot.

Those are the promises, the promises of love //// and joy //// and peace //// that we must hold tightly as we return to our daily routine with Christmas over and done with, and things not all that much different than what they were BEFORE we began our celebrations. And yet, //// we may, //// if we will let ourselves, return to business as usual with a new sense that the one born at Christmas holds fast to us as WE hold fast to HIS promises. When that IS our sense, then Christmas has truly happened //// and right where it happened originally: in the flesh and blood world where we try to live our lives and where we try for something more...looking to Jesus to bring that something more to pass, to bring those promises to pass. We may have some rotten days in the process, as the frazzled man in the cartoon that I mentioned earlier. We cannot help but have some rotten days in the process. But Jesus will go through them with us /////// remember, he had some rotten days of his own. But if we put our hands in His, He can redeem our difficult days and let the light from above shine through them.

Just remember, it is precisely into those "mangers" that Christ is born. THERE God is made flesh. There HE would use OUR flesh, our ever so fallible humanity, to help bring in his

kingdom, to participate with him...nothing less than God come amongst us. As this mornings Gospel said, "We observed His star at it's rising and have come to pay Him homage."

One of the great preachers of all time, Howard Thurman, wrote these words:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are home with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost, to heal the broken,
To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations, to bring peace,
To make music in the heart.

Well, so then, I would say THAT is NOT THAT! ///// Even when we have taken the tree down. The work of Christmas has just begun here in this TIME BEING, the most trying time of all. It's easy enough to believe in Christmas as we are crowded among the carolers on Christmas Eve. It's something else to believe in Christmas on the streets or in the schools or in the workplace, wherever you may find yourself tomorrow.

"Blessed be God...who has blessed US in Christ!"
AMEN