

“A Savior is Born”

Luke 2:1-20

Susan S. Izard

December 24, 2009

As some of you know, I have a nephew named Charlie who is six years old. He lives in central Maine and is currently the family theologian. Earlier this month he was thinking a lot about toy factories and the excitement of Christmas. He has also been thinking about the Christmas story and trying to link the Santa story and the Christmas story together. One night when his mom was putting him to bed he said: “You know mom, Jesus is like a factory, a factory that gives us all the things we want, but not the things normal factories make. His factory gives us the things we really need, like peace, joy, love and wisdom. Those things are better than toys. They make you happier.”

Thank God for six year olds and their ability to see truth. Charlie’s insight is exactly what the Christmas story is all about. In the midst of everyday life – on an average night in the middle of winter – a Savior is born, The Messiah, God-with-us. This Messiah saves us from ourselves. Instead of focusing on protecting our investments and taking care of our perceived wants and needs, the Christmas story gives us an alternative vision – an alternative way of seeing what matters in life. In the babe Jesus we see that what really matters is honoring God’s values. As Charlie said, Jesus gives us peace, joy, love and wisdom. These gifts make us happier than anything we can buy.

In the Gospel of Luke, it is clear that the Christ Child brings the gift of peace to the world. A multitude of heavenly hosts announces this peace saying: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” In contrast to the ways of the Caesar Augustus who claimed peace through conquering, God proclaims peace through love. It is interesting to note that this heavenly message was not given to noblemen and women, rather to humble peasants – shepherds in the fields watching over their flock by night. In a way, God started a radically new understanding of peace that night – a grassroots understanding so to speak. Those informed were the common folk. Those who followed Jesus in the years to come were the common folk. Those who sought God’s wisdom and truth were the common folk. Their persistence in this heavenly vision changed the history of the world. Our faith was born by common folk seeking truth in the midst of life. The Christ Child – the Prince of Peace – would show believers throughout the centuries God’s values. Following the way of Christ means seeking the way of peace.

In the early 20th century an interesting theologian named Teilhard de Chardin predicted that there would be a time in the near future when the entire world would be able to communicate with each other quickly and easily. He called this era of world history the noosphere. While Teilhard could not have named this way of communication the World Wide Web, he predicted world wide communication would unite humans across the planet. He believed this communication would encourage humans to reach toward a higher consciousness – reach towards the ways of God – regardless of national, cultural and religious traditions that divide us. He believed people all over the world would reach out to each other and seek the ways of peace, love, joy and wisdom and transform the world.

It is fascinating to see how this is happening. In a very real sense, there is a huge grassroots movement afoot and it is taking place on the Internet. This fall, theologian Karin Armstrong and religious people all over the world launched the Charter for Compassion. Its purpose is to “restore compassion to the center of morality and religion - to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate.” (www.charterforcompassion.org). Another internet based peace project is the Peace Planet Project. This group has written a beautiful Peace Planet Proclamation that begins: “We the people of Planet Earth do hereby claim our universal and unalienable rights to Peace.” It goes on to asks citizens of every country, elders, artists, musicians, creative ones, working people, teachers, healers, Inventors, mothers, fathers, grandparents, people from every walk of life to have the courage to practice the ways of peace (www.peaceplanetproject.com). Every morning, I begin my day with a quote from a website called www.Gratefulness.org an organization that believes the practice of gratitude is the foundation for the way of peace and love. On December 22nd, the morning quote by A. J. Muste read: “There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.” These are only a few examples of how the World Wide Web is launching this grassroots Peace Movement. While we aren’t shepherds in the fields, we are common folk who know that God’s way of peace is the way of truth and light. The babe in the manger made that announcement 2000 years ago. We are invited to follow.

The shepherds knew that seeking God’s way of peace wasn’t just a good idea – the Angel and heavenly host taught them that following God’s way means knowing God – linking with God – being a part of the heavenly story. When we follow God’s way of peace we encounter God’s light, God’s glory and walk right into God’s mysterious presence.

In early December, my husband and I flew down to Atlanta so we could listen to our daughter sing in her choir’s Service of Lessons and Carols at Emory University. This service is a big deal at Emory with both the University and Concert Choirs singing and various professors and administrators reading the scripture passages. It is held in a huge Methodist Church that holds 1200 people. People stand in line for an hour to get a seat even though the service is held three different times over the weekend. I love this service because it falls at the beginning of December and is a festive way to start the Advent Season. The organ, the choir, the scripture and the prayers remind me again of the glory of this season and the wonder of the gift of God-with-us.

At one point during the service this year, the Concert Choir stood and sang an A Capella piece by Morten Lauridsen called *O Magnum Mysterium*, O Great Mystery. It is an anthem about the peace and wonder of God’s love. Words cannot describe the experience of listening to this anthem that night. The combination of being in a sacred sanctuary, the voices, the music, the harmony, the words, the utter and complete beauty of the sound linked us to heaven. We could feel God’s presence with us. It was as though the choir sang God to us – or the harmony melted our hearts so we could dwell with God. No one moved at the end of the piece until there was a collective sigh of awe. We had all experienced a moment of truth, light and love.

It must have been like that for the shepherds when the angel and the heavenly host praised God saying: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those who he favors.” The feeling of wonder, awe and peace sent them looking for the babe lying in a manger.

May God's presence dwell with us tonight. May the mystery, awe and wonder of the incarnation fill our lives with peace and joy. And, may the light of love surround us this night and ever more. Amen.

© 2009, Susan Izard