

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.

From Auden, For the Time Being

Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,
Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes --
Some have got broken -- and carrying them up to the attic.
The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,
And the children got ready for school. There are enough
Left-overs to do, warmed-up, for the rest of the week --
Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot,
Stayed up so late, attempted -- quite unsuccessfully --
To love all of our relatives, and in general
Grossly overestimated our powers. Once again
As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed
To do more than entertain it as an agreeable
Possibility, once again we have sent Him away,
Begging though to remain His disobedient servant,

To those who have seen
The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,
The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.
For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly
Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be

Grew up when it opened. Now, recollecting that moment
We can repress the joy, but the guilt remains conscious;

Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
Everything became a You and nothing was an It.
And craving the sensation but ignoring the cause,
We look round for something, no matter what, to inhibit
Our self-reflection, and the obvious thing for that purpose
Would be some great suffering. So, once we have met the Son,
We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father;
In the meantime, There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair,
Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem
From insignificance.

The happy morning is over,
The night of agony still to come; the time is noon:
When the Spirit must practice his scales of rejoicing
Without even a hostile audience, and the Soul endure
A silence that is neither for nor against her faith
That God's Will will be done, That, in spite of her prayers,
God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph.

So what do we make of it all. The bittersweet anticipation of advent, the rush of Christmas eve suddenly upon us, the children bringing tears to our eyes ran around in ragged costumes invoking yet again that primal drama, of that night so long ago. Buried somewhere deep in our memory, DNA perhaps, the smells and sounds of our own childhood, memories of our own pageants. And then the day itself, celebrations, rest, family traditions and conflicts mixed together with testing Covid Isolation, anxiety, insurrection, grieving and painful memoriesand then, it's over.

It is certainly much easier to quarantine Jesus to holidays, special events, and Sunday mornings. It is much more challenging to open ourselves and to invite the Holy Light of Christ into every breath we take.

Were we prepared to take the risk of birthing Jesus, the Way of Love into our lives?

Were we ready for the light of this Christ child to shine in our darkness? Were we ready to shine our light into the world?

“And some things that should not have been forgotten were lost. History became legend. Legend became myth. And for two and a half thousand years, the ring passed out of all knowledge.” — **Galadriel in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*,**

In today's Gospel consider the agency of the shepherds. Shepherds were probably uneducated, unsophisticated, poorly paid, perhaps homeless, and most likely not active pledging members of the local synagogue. We might say they kept a low profile and lived on the fringes. Yet we are told that they immediately responded to the message from the Archangel Gabriel.

After some coaching, songs, and poetry from Gabriel the 3 shepherds (Jacob, Isaac, and Samuel) agreed to leave their flocks unattended, and to take with them a pure white lamb as a gift and set off to find this child. In the village they searched for this manger, and were dismissed as drunken rowdy shepherds,

The shepherds persevered and finally found this baby and his parents. They shared with Mary and Joseph what they had been told. They left and returned home, praising God repeating their story to everyone who would listen. As Gabriel tells the story, they were the first apostles, messengers. We know this from Gabriel's Gospel.

Ok, so maybe Gabriel didn't really leave a written narrative, other than transcribed in the Koran. Perhaps his Gospel was written by someone else. We might imagine, who is telling their story?

I have a voice like thunder, through which I move the whole earth with the living sounds of all creatures. It is I, the Ancient of Days, who do this. By my Word, which always was and remains in me without beginning, I commanded a great light to come forth, and with it innumerable sparks, the angels. (Hildegard of Bingen)

Luke's Gospel proclaims that Mary remembered these things, pondered them in her heart. We assume it took time for her to understand deeply all that had happened, and the pain she would suffer when the sword pierced her heart. We know from the Gospel that she and Joseph followed tradition ***they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them*** and on the 8th day named and circumcised their infant son as we remember on January 1st.

Are we ready for the light of Christ to shine in the dark fear filled places that haunt us? Are we prepared to name Jesus in our own hearts?

Whatever darkness overcomes this world, whatever gloom or depression hangs over our own lives; the darkness is not sufficient to suffocate the light. We are promised to be fed by the word and called to be agents of love to each other recognizing that our smallest gesture of compassion, mercy, justice, and tradition will shine light on our fragile planet. We can be rabblers like John, story tellers like the shepherds, stepfathers like Joseph, or teenage mothers like Mary.

The big event is over. We know that the living memory of the creche, angels, shepherds, animals, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus is not meant to be packed up with the ornaments and neatly hidden in the basement, garage or attic...and forgotten. We understand that the love God is incarnated through Jesus is intended as the Gift of Christmas to be deeply rooted in our lives, our hearts, our souls.

Let us clear space in our complicated lives for naming, nursing and mothering God's incarnation, Let us clear space for that light to shine through us. For each of us to be enthusiastic agents, disciples and apostles, of that light shining into the darkness of a broken world.

Numbers 6:22-27

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them,

The LORD bless you and keep you;

the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

Luke 2:15-21

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.