

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

But here and now the Word which is implicit in the Beginning and in the End is become immediately explicit, and that which hitherto we could only passively fear as the incomprehensible I AM, henceforth we may actively love with comprehension that THOU ART.

Wherefore, having seen Him, not in some prophetic vision of what might be, but with the eyes of our own weakness as to what actually is, we are bold to say that we have seen our salvation.

CHORUS: Now and forever, we are not alone.

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,
and memories of our own pageants. And then the day itself,
celebrations, rest, old family traditions and conflicts mixed together
with Covid Isolation and anxiety, insurrection, grieving and painful
memoriesand then, it's over.

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

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

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

In today's Gospel consider the agency of the shepherds. Shepherds
were probably uneducated, unsophisticated, poorly paid, perhaps
homeless, and most likely not active 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. Like Mary the shepherds exercised their free will and capacity to discern and to act independently.

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 The Koran what was transcribed. Perhaps his Gospel was written by someone else. We should consider however, who is telling the 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, in some translations pondered them in her heart. We might assume it took

some time for her to understand fully deeply all that had happened and told her story at some future time.

Some Biblical Scholars have suggested that Mary wrote, or at the least guided Luke in the writing of the Gospel by that name. Scholars have noted that the number of feminine nouns and verbs are more than doubled in Luke compared to Mark and Matthew. Perhaps Mary had influence in Luke's Gospel.

Today's readings are from a new lectionary, [A Woman's lectionary for the whole church](#), recently published, written by Wilda Gafney, Episcopal Priest and Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School. I highly recommend it.

She writes 'These Christmas Lessons center an image rarely proffered in liturgy or preaching but common in art and culture, the nursing mother as an icon of love'. In Isaiah the promise is made of being fed by an overflowing stream and in Peter the promise that the Lord's Word endures forever as we love each other deeply and earnestly.

Are you ready for the light of Christ to shine in the dark fear filled places that haunt you?

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, or justice, 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 should understand that the love God has incarnated through Jesus is intended as the Gift of Christmas to be deeply rooted in our lives, our hearts, our souls.

“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, The Lord of the Rings**

Let us clear a space in our complicated lives for pregnancy, birthing, nursing and mothering God’s incarnation, 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.