

## **The Silent One**

Christmas Eve 2008

*Matthew 1:18-25*

It is finally Christmas, and the Christmas season *begins*.  
Now, I realize that things nowadays are somewhat askew,  
and because we do not do waiting well,  
the Christmas season seems to begin with Black Friday and to end today.  
FYI: the Christmas season lasts until January 11.  
Advent was (supposedly!) a time of waiting, of expectant longing.  
If ever you did not really awaken your heart, it is never too late.  
Open your heart now with faith and hope: an 11<sup>th</sup> hour desire...

All of our seasonal preparation, i.e. the four weeks of Advent  
(*praying*, decorating, choosing and wrapping gifts, singing, baking,  
traveling—for those who are visiting and whom we welcome)  
culminate in the utter simplicity of this celebration,  
and all that flows hereupon.

What is striking is that Advent does not end with a bang.  
We come here to be close to One who is silent, silent

- *like* a newborn (well, like some newborns!)
- *in* the Eucharist
- *because* He is spirit and eternal love.

Now, one might be tempted to say somewhat sarcastically, “Is that all?”  
Worry not: there is more than meets the eye.  
We cannot fathom the closeness.  
And in that silent closeness is found the deepest fulfillment of the human heart.

*Indeed: St. Leo the Great preached on a Christmas day 1600 years ago*  
*Dearly beloved, today our Savior is born; let us rejoice.*  
*Sadness should have no place on the birthday of Life.*  
*The fear of death has been swallowed.*  
*Life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness.*

The One who is Life—the Silent One—is Jesus the Christ:

- God become human
- Word made flesh
- Light from Light

We are here this evening because *Christmas is this Christ*.  
We are all mysteriously and, for the most part, unconsciously drawn.  
Sure:

- it may a family tradition
- we may have some vague sense that if we do not do the church thing, something will be amiss

But, if Christ is real, then He draws us.  
He draws us because He is Goodness Itself, He is Love.  
Goodness radiates, and draws to Itself.  
Jesus is Love enfleshed.  
Jesus is God born as a child so that we not fear.  
It is hard to believe sometimes.  
Believe it.  
It seems too good to be true.  
It is purely good and true.

The attraction at Christmas is not the cuteness of an imagined infant (even though, two thousand + years ago, Jesus was a *beautiful* baby...).  
The attraction at Christmas is Jesus, the Christ, present *in our midst*.  
We do well to begin to grasp this, so that we can more fully live in this *Presence*.  
Life only makes complete sense in living in this Presence, in living in *His* Presence ...

Christmas can be so challenging for many.  
Why is Christmas so challenging for many?  
Expectations run so very high:  
    expectations of peace and joy, familial harmony and reconciliation...  
This evening ought to be a faith experience.  
In faith, there is never any disappointment.  
The One who is life always responds.  
Does His presence “fix” everything?  
Of course not.  
His presence does mean, however, that love can have the last word  
    —in the midst of our brokenness.

This evening we gather as a community that has been graced/gifted with *faith* and *hope*.  
Faith enables us to touch that which we do not see.  
Hope enables us to cling to that which we do not see.  
This evening I speak to you in faith.  
i.e. of what I believe, of what *we* believe, of what we know deep inside without seeing.  
This evening I hope with you.  
We ought to expect much regarding

- that which we do not see.
- the Mystery of love which takes hold of us.

There is no proof of this invisible Mystery which we celebrate.  
Yet, the fact that we continue to celebrate  
—especially given all that incites us not to celebrate (including our fatigue and doubts)  
—is perhaps a sign that it is real.  
We would, of course, so like for Christ to be visible.  
Understandably so: we are sentient beings who need to see and to touch and to hear...  
Hence all of the symbols and representations  
that bespeak Him, whom we believe to be present: candles and greenery, and a nativity.  
These are all little stepping-stones for us.  
In the end, however: faith and hope and an invisible Mystery.

All of us come with different desires.  
Let us reformulate them for the utmost fulfillment, and desire more precisely:

- to welcome Him who welcomes us
- to let Him be born in us that we might be reborn in Him

If He is really present, then *awe* should fill our hearts, awe like that of Joseph.  
Jesus was really born into a human lineage (cf. gospel),  
but he was not only, not just human.  
What does Joseph seek to do upon discovery of Mary's pregnancy?  
Was he embarrassed to death and wanted to drop her?  
It is reasonable to conclude that he was overcome with *awe*,  
and opts to step aside respectfully, in order to leave Mary alone with God.

Awe is the appropriate response.  
Awe is the appropriate response before greatness.  
Awe is the appropriate response before great love that stoops to embrace.  
Let there be awe this night.  
Heaven has come to our little earth, so that earth might be joined to heaven.  
Heaven has come to each of our little lives, so that, deep inside,  
the life of heaven might begin.  
Although outward appearance may suggest otherwise, deeply, everything has changed.  
Heaven, i.e. *God*, indwells our lives.  
A God of love embraces our whole person, including our frail flesh.  
*The Word became flesh*  
We are invited to rest in the Prince of Peace.  
Let us be close, and thus be full of joy.  
And let the gift of this night melt away any despair or hurt or division.  
*Sadness should have no place on the birthday of Life.*