

LET IT COME

We have done about all that we can do. The time is upon us. According to the way of counting days in Jesus' time, Christmas day began at sundown today and goes until sundown tomorrow. We are already into Christmas Day – into the magic and the mystery. *“Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given.”* (Isaiah 9:6) Only, this time: Incarnation! Oh my, too many dimensions. The mind spins too fast, and we want it to be calm and quiet tonight so we can be grateful and adoring.

In any case, whatever preparations we have made, we have made. We have tried to get our houses ready. We have prepared food and gifts and decorations. We have sent greetings and wrapped presents, and a lot of thought and planning have gone into it, whether it all comes out exactly as we hoped or not.

We have also prepared our inner houses. We have dealt with some old resentments, we have tried to improve our present obedience, and we have looked to the love we have received – tried to free it up again to flow more easily within and through us. We have done about everything we can do. And now the time is upon us.

I don't know about you, but that always brings me to exactly where I need to be: the stark realization that no matter how much I do, I really do not have power enough to bring the real Christmas. I cannot change or convert anybody, never mind the whole world. I cannot even change or convert myself. I can play-act and pretend at it a little, but for real? No. He really does have to come, or there is no hope for us. Millions of people spending billions of dollars and all celebrating at the same time make a really impressive party. But it does not add up to Incarnation: God coming to be with us. No, the Incarnation is quite beyond us – dramatically and categorically beyond us.

Do not mistake me: I think some of the things we do are exceedingly special and wonderful and very, very nice. I am sure we all hope that it might even please Jesus that we try to honor His birth in some way. I simply know and acknowledge that it is not within our power to connect our souls to the Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ. That is not something we can do. That is something He has to do for us. It is not in our hands anymore. It is not up to us from here on in.

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And while He waits for our permission and invitation before invading our lives, yet He is the One who must do it for us. And when He does, nothing is ever the same again.

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A thirteen-year-old boy who attended Mohawk Central School in Pains Hollow, New York, heard an appeal for contributions to Santa Claus Anonymous, a group that provided gifts for unfortunate children who would otherwise go without Christmas presents. The boy was touched by the appeal. He had not had many presents as a young lad growing up, so he determined to save what he could for this purpose. He did whatever extra errands and tasks he could think up or talk anyone into until, on the Friday before Christmas vacation began, he had saved up \$16.43. He had hoped for more, yet it was still quite an achievement, all things considered, and certainly a labor of love. But a blizzard had hit the area Thursday night, and as far as the boy knew, this was the last chance to turn in the money in time to help with Christmas. The school buses were not running, so the boy bundled himself up in the few clothes he had and trudged his way to school, two miles through the blizzard.

But none of the classes were meeting. Neither students nor teachers had come out in such bad weather. At first the boy was afraid the whole school was locked up, but there was a light on in the Principal's office. The Principal lived only a few blocks away, and he had come to catch up on some work. The boy knocked on his door and was let in, and the boy explained his mission and turned the money over to the Principal. The Principal accepted the small gift with dignity and sincere appreciation. When the boy had gone back out into the blizzard, the Principal laid his head down on his desk and wept. Then with sadness, shaking his head, he struck the boy's name from the list of destitute children who were to receive Christmas presents from Santa Claus Anonymous that year.

I tell this story lest you misunderstand my point. I am at least as sentimental as any of you. The story moves me. I have to take three deep breaths and steel myself to even get through telling it. It is not that people cannot be involved in the great drama, or that people do not get caught up in the meanings of Christmas. *Of course* we can feel it and express it and be part of it, or it would have no relevance to us. Yet when we do, it is always more than our efforts and more than our plans. The boy was "innocent" of his incredible witness. It caught the Principal completely off guard and sent him deep into Christmas.

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Thankfully this Principal was wise enough to honor the gift, even though it meant depriving the boy of presents already wrapped and ready for him. Sensible plans and strategies had to suddenly be scratched, or more important things would have been ruined.

The real Christmas is always carrying surprises. It is bigger than we are. It comes from beyond us. Its source tracks back to the love of God and the Christ of God. Luke has been trying to tell us for generations: Christmas is when we hear the angels – God’s messengers come in whatever guise – telling us of a gift unspeakably beyond our expectations: a gift so high that at first it mixes terror with joy, and fear with peace. Getting a new pocket knife or a new apron just doesn’t say it well enough. Getting an Eternal Destiny and a NEW NAME comes a little closer. And Luke says this gift is even more than *that*. It is FOR ALL THE PEOPLE. Have you ever noticed how much bad theology is thrown out the window with that little phrase? *It is for all the people!*

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We have done what we have done. There is no more time. It is not up to us from here on in. And yet – strangely, quietly, subtly – there is one more thing. I suppose it’s nothing – and in fact, that is exactly what it is: a no-thing. There is a difference between *stopping* the action and *doing* “no-thing.” I am talking about a purposeful, concentrated, conscious change from doing things to doing no-thing – to waiting: from yang to yin; from control to release; from giving to receiving. We may not be very good at giving, but we are certainly a great deal better at giving than we are at receiving! Now is a time for receiving ... for going receptive ... for doing no-thing. LET IT COME. Allow it in. Let it be given. Receive it.

Humans come in layers. What you see is never what you get. It is never that small. What you see is hardly even worth getting. Only some of the unmarried are impressed by the crust. Anyway, about three layers down, I think most of us are deathly afraid that maybe God does not really exist or maybe God does not really care. So we are afraid to let it come – for fear it will not. What if we took our hands off of Christmas so it would really come, and then nothing happened? Who could withstand such devastation? Better, we think, to never know for sure – than to risk the devastation of a true and deep disappointment. Better, even, to come right out and deny there is any such truth – than to get drawn into a false hope of such incredible magnitude.

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I am partly sorry to get us off on this track, but we need to realize the reticence. We need to risk the devastation! Take the chance. Stop trying to produce anything. See if it really is real. Let it come ... let God bring it ... let the Christ come to you. Do no-thing. It is that time now. It must come that way – or be forever partial, uncertain, unclear, unreal.

LET IT COME! Step out of the way. Open the door. Unclench the fist. Take away the shields. Open the hands. Open the heart. Let it come ...

And as I say that, do you feel it? The resistance, I mean? We ward it off; set conditions; lock it down with fears, skepticism, busyness, noise, even the needs of others. Get the rest of the world fixed first, get ourselves perfect first, and then maybe we will reconsider taking the risk of finding out if He is really here and truly real.

Tonight you do not have to be a critic. You do not have to decide foreign policy. You do not have to save the country's economy, or even your own. Maybe in a week or so, God will ask you to help with such things, I don't know. God does strange things and gives strange assignments to those who let God in. But not tonight. Tonight you do not have to save the world or your spouse or your children or your friends or anybody. That is being done, of course. God is in charge of it. Christ is at work on such things all the time. Only, we cannot help very much if we do not let this Christmas thing into our own souls first. So first we have to let it come ...

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Bob Benson (author, speaker, publisher) writes:

Nearly a year ago, Peg and I had a very hard week.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT: Mike slept downstairs in his room, where children belong. And we slept upstairs in our bedroom, where moms and dads belong.

THURSDAY NIGHT: We were 350 miles away from home. He was in Ramada 325 and we were in 323, connecting rooms, and we left the door open and talked and laughed together for a long time.

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FRIDAY NIGHT: 700 miles from home, and he was in Room 247 and we were in 239, but it was just down the balcony, and somehow we still seemed together.

SATURDAY NIGHT: He was in the freshman dorm, and we were still in Room 239, and it was starting to get a lot harder.

SUNDAY NIGHT: We were home, and he was 700 miles away in Chapman 309.

Now, we have been through this before. Bob Jr. had gone off to college, and we had gathered ourselves together until we finally came to terms with it – mainly because he’s married now and lives ten miles away, and he comes to visit often with Deb and little Robert III. So we thought we knew how to handle separation pretty well. But we still came away too lonely and blue.

Oh, our hearts were filled with pride at this fine young man, and our minds were filled with memories from tricycles to commencements, but deep down inside somewhere, we just ached with loneliness and pain.

Somebody said, “You still have three at home!” Three fine kids, and there is still plenty of noise; plenty of ballgames to go to; plenty of responsibilities; plenty of laughter; plenty of everything. Everything except Mike. And in parental math, five minus one equals minus one.

And I started thinking about God. He sure has plenty of children – plenty of artists and singers and carpenters and candlestick makers and preachers – plenty of everybody ... except YOU.

And all of them put together can never take your place. There will always be an empty place in his heart – and a vacant chair at his table – if you are not home. And if once in a while it feels like he is crowding you a bit – getting pushy or fussy – try to forgive him. It may be one of those nights when he misses you so much he can just hardly stand it.

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LET IT COME

On a night like tonight, God could not stand it any longer and decided to come looking for you. That's the reason for all the fuss and bother. Step out of the way. Open the door. Unclench the fist. Take away the shields. Open the hands and the heart and do no-thing. Let Christ come – all the way in – to you.

PRAYER

Almighty God – who, in Your mercy, comes to us in so many ways – cause to shine upon us the brightness of Christ's coming, that the wonder of Your love may become in us a deep and constant joy. May our confidence shift entirely from *our* abilities and achievements to YOUR power – to Your plans and purposes. And may we finally shed the last remnants of our mistrust and open our arms and lives to You, to whom – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be glory and dominion and honor and praise, now and forever more. Amen.

SILENT REFLECTION

Now is a time for your own thoughts – a time just between you and God. Two quiet minutes to let all the haste flow away, and to let the peace and awareness flow in.

RECEIVING THE LIGHT

As most of us know, the light was waiting for us for as far back as we can remember. It was a strange, almost eerie realization that the light was there before we were willing to receive it. It is a great mystery that we have to be willing to receive the light before we can feel it or see it. Knowing that now, we also know that there is more to be received, so we symbolize that in our celebration as well. We take the light from the Christ candle, it comes to us from others and through us to others, but we must still be willing to receive it. So may it ever be, for all of us.

BENEDICTION

Jesus said, *“Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears.”*

Deep peace of Christ – the Light of the World – be unto you, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.