

“A Child’s Christmas”

The conventional wisdom about Christmas is that it is for children. Perhaps that is because it is about a child being born. Perhaps it is because of gift giving and the great excitement children have anticipating the gifts they will receive from St. Nicholas AKA Santa Claus. Perhaps it is because we adults have fond memories of our childhood Christmases. Those memories inform our Christmas practices and how we adults strive to make Christmas special for our children.

The memories of Christmas are exemplified in the Dylan Thomas selection read at the beginning of the service. Some of us who grew up in rural areas can identify with his memories. Others who grew up in urban environments may attach similar feelings to his story even if they are not identical. Regardless, it is beautiful and the nostalgia is palpable. It puts us in the mood for a quiet Christmas Eve and anticipation of a joyful Christmas morn.

However, I think the idea that Christmas is for children may be more profound than any of us realize. We may feel all of the thoughts and emotions I have mentioned, but there is also something underlying them that, whether or not we recognize it, is transforming us. If we give ourselves the time and peace to contemplate the miracle of Christmas we may realize that our adult lives have gotten in the way of our childlike joy of the season.

Perhaps we feel that it is inappropriate to feel so much joy, that it is only children who should be allowed this much fun. Perhaps there is a social prohibition to being so joyful. That we will be stigmatized as immature or childish. That kind of merriment is only for youngsters who do not know the difficulties of life. Who do not know how hard it is to have to work to support a family or ourselves. Who do not know the many disappointments that are ahead, profound disappointments that far exceed not getting the desired gift for Christmas. Who have not felt the pain and loss of relationships and death.

We try to protect them from those experiences as long as possible. In doing so we take on the heavy weight of life. But in doing so we become a bit cynical. Our Christmas time takes a hard edge to it. We try to put on the mantle of joy but it does not seem to fit any more. Yet I think we have it in us and can retrieve it if we want. That is by letting children’s anticipation and joy infect us. Not just influence us as that is to ephemeral. Rather like the cold they bring home from school that eventually gets everyone in the house infected let their joy become the bug that everyone catches. Let that bug take over. As the old saying goes “feed a cold.” Feed this bug with your childhood memories, your family memories and the memories you are making this Christmas.

If Christmas is for children, then we should all be children at Christmas. Find your inner child and let it out to be in communion with the children around you. Even if you live alone go out to the shops and get infected with the joy of the children on the street and in the stores. Watch them visiting Santa Claus, wondering at the lights, marveling at Nativity Crèches, decorations, carriage rides, Christmas trees, stars, and so much more. Catch the Christmas bug from the children and find the joy for yourself. Piety at this holy season is a good thing but not if it turns us into a grumpy Grinch or a humbugging Scrooge.

The Rev. Eugene LeCouteur
Emanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, Virginia

4:00 p.m. & 10:00 p.m.
December 24, 2023
Christmas Eve, Year B

As one example of childlike joy that can feed us and bring us back to ourselves, I offer this poem called “Sharon’s Prayer” by John Shea, from his book *The Hour of the Unexpected*.¹

She was five, and
sure of the facts,
and recited them
with solemn solemnity,
convinced every word
was revelation.

She said

They were so poor
They had only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
to eat
And they went a long way from home
Without getting lost. The lady rode
a donkey, the man walked, and the baby
was inside the lady.
They had to stay in a stable
With an ox and an ass (hee-hee)
but the Three Rich Men found them
because a star lited the roof.
Shepherds came and you could
Pet the sheep but not feed them.
Then the baby was borned.
And do you know who he was?

Her quarter eyes inflated
to silver dollars.

The baby was God.

And she jumped in the air,
Whirled round, dove into the sofa,
And buried her head under the cushion
Which is the only proper response
to the Good News of the Incarnation.

No matter your chronological age, may your Christmas be so full of joy that all you know how to do is jump, twirl, and dive into the sofa at the wonder of God’s incarnation in the baby Jesus. And if anyone calls you childish and silly, thank them and bless them and wish them a Merry Christmas.

Merry Christmas.

¹ *The Hour of the Unexpected* by John Shea [Argus Publications, 1977]