

ARCHIVES INCARNATION

INNER VIEWS
Joy to the World

The Savior who was born to us has been reborn within us. born in the past and reborn in our flesh and blood. Because of Jesus we too are filled with Divine presence and love. And then we are baptized into this mystery so that we can be anointed with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes the promise of our maturing and development into the divine children of God, sisters and brothers of Jesus. These are not pious words or religious poetry. They are our deepest reality. They are our hope of salvation into the human-divine life. The Savior we hoped for outside of our self has become our inner reality. This is our Father's way of loving.

Easter, the celebration of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, is the essential mystery of our Christian faith. However Christmas captures our imagination more fully. "Christmas has got the baby!" There is something about Jesus, as a helpless infant, that gets to our hearts. This is the mystery of God becoming human, taking on our flesh and blood, all that it means to be one of us. This is the wondrous revelation of the way God relates to us and the incredible revelation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of what it means to truly be human.

We cannot understand the crib and Incarnation in an analytical, abstract way. Each of us is welcomed into the stories and images of Jesus' birth as tales of our own heritage and identity.

The wonder of the crib or Incarnation is that God saves us by pouring divinity into our humanness. The Word Becomes Flesh, God becomes human, the Darkness becomes Light; all tell us of the unconquerable God who gives himself into the vulnerability of our humanity. A God who surrender to each one of us is the mystery of the child in the crib. God becomes one of us, a child totally dependent on his parents.

But this is just half of the story. Jesus' Incarnation is linked to our becoming. Christ is born today through our rebirth. The mystic, Angelus Silesus, puts us right in the middle of the Christmas story "What does it profit me if Gabriel hails the Virgin unless he brings to me the very selfsame tidings?"

The Gospels weave a rich tapestry of images which draw us into God's imagination, and God's vision. As we retell the story every year of the unexpected and marvelous birth of the Holy One among us, we experience the intimacy and the mystery of that relationship in a new way. Our relationship with Jesus grows and matures as our imagination grows and matures. Jesus, who began by snuggling up to our hearts as children, uses that heart to pry us open to the unrestricted grandeur of Unconditional Love. We are living a mystery that resonates with our deepest self and yet is always more than we can know. We intuit its reality but never grasp its breadth. Its meaning comes from the deepest level of our sense of our own reality.

Ordinarily we think of the Incarnation as God entering human life and history in the person of Jesus. But the Incarnation is also about our entering into the life of God.

We possess a dual destiny, human and divine. When we begin to understand what it means for Jesus to be human we have an opening for expanding our identity and humbly accepting all of

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who we are. As humans we are limited to time and space, and because we are wounded human beings we are bound by fear, anger and defensive judgments. As humans we also burst forth into creation from the heart of God. We are loved unconditionally or we would not exist. And we are created to be partners in creation, embodying the divine mystery for one another.

Reflecting on what it means for Jesus to be human and divine acts as a template and source of our healing, redemption and becoming. We begin to understand love as the concrete foundation for our transformation. Because God loves us into existence we are both human and divine.

God walks among us as one like us. As John's Gospel so graphically tells us: "*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14). The divine walks among us to manifest the reality and closeness of divine presence. The divine is so close, and so real, that the divine outpouring of love is the Source of our reality. The divine walks among us to lead us to our shared reality. This means that when we try to understand ourselves, when we ask "Who am I", we must more accurately ask, "Whose am I?" We are Divine Love's continued expression. We are the flesh and blood of God, who continues to walk this earth through our lives.

I am, you are, we are the out pouring of Love. We are loved absolutely and unconditionally, or we wouldn't exist. Please take a moment to let this sink in. It's your deepest reality.

"Jesus became human so that humans might become divine" is the way early theologians summarized the Incarnation of Christ. Jesus is the perfect expression of all that we can be in response to the love of the Father pouring itself into this world for salvation. Jesus becoming flesh is the pattern of our becoming humanly divine. We become whole by becoming God's. We are God's infinite love in the limits of this time and place. Along with Jesus we can become aware that we are divine and beloved children. He is our Word also, the revealing of who we are. His gospel is our biography. We possess a dual destiny, human and divine, and it plays itself out in every part of our lives. Joy! You are in the world. Joy! The Father's gift is in your stockings. And your joy is to give this gift away. Merry Christmas to one and all. Ho, ho, ho, the joke is on us. God saves the world by recreating us.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

Incarnation is our purpose

Christmas lingers in us. It comes and goes in the stores and the radio stations but it is not so fleeting in our soul. Our soul is changed forever. Because of Jesus, the divine-human Son of the Father/Creator we are divine/human sisters and brothers. This is our nature, what makes us to be who we are, and marks us as children of the Father, forever. We are divinely human and intimately related by our essence. These words seem so abstract but they are our reality, they permeate every aspect of our lives. Christmas lingers in us.

Our lives mirror Trinity, Father/Creator, Son and Holy Spirit, and our soul reverberates with their essence. Created in the image of our Creator we have an inner purpose. Created in the

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image of the divine-human Son our inner purpose is expressed in the flesh and blood of our outer purpose. And created in the image of the Holy Spirit our life develops and matures as the evolving of the kingdom of heaven and earth, our inner and outer purpose joins the Son's and the Creator's purpose.

I wish I had a poet's stark eloquence or a songwriter's ability to break through to our soul. It's so easy to trivialize the reality that is ours. When Jesus became one of us he not only changed our mind he changed our whole being. Christmas will never end as long as children are born.

Our inner purpose is to become aware of the intimacy of Trinity loving us into existence. Our outer purpose is to express that love in the concreteness and circumstances of our unique personality. Traditionally the saints and mystics have stressed the inner dimension of God and God's love. For them God is all powerful, all knowing, unconditional and eternal, never changing. God's creative love radiates these qualities through our lives. The Greek word for this kind of love is "Eros." Our word "erotic" comes from it because God's creative love is expressed through our instinct to procreate as well as our desire to express ourselves through our lives. Eros is God's creative energy which we share in our creative needs and desires. Eros is experienced as a desire to be creative and a desire to be united with God.

But Jesus, in his divine-humanity, reveals another dimension of love for which we use the Greek word "agape." This is love that deals with the concrete situation of our lives. When John the Baptists' disciples come to Jesus they ask, "What signs do you give." He tells them to "Go and tell John what you see and hear: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." These are not purely spiritual manifestations of love. We can see them and hear them. They are apparent to our senses. God's creative love is also a love that cares for us in our humanness, brokenness and need – it is a "saving" love, a love that saves our body-soul, inner and outer, divine and human self.

Our purpose, because we are created in the divine image is to express both dimensions of love through our lives. This is the deep meaning of Christmas. And that meaning continues throughout the year as the Holy Spirit works in our lives.

As the Holy Spirit works in our lives we become more in tune with the unconditional love of our Creator, which is the purpose of our lives. At first our lives are bent on survival and our energy is focused on our self. As the Holy Spirit grows us spiritually through both our nature and nurture (inner and outer experiences) we become aware of other people and begin to care about their well being. At first this caring is limited to our family, friends and our nationality. Then the Holy Spirit expands our loving to embrace the greater world around us and we develop a compassionate sensitivity to people in general. We can feel inner boundaries melting and Trinity's loving energy flowing more freely through us. We feel a spontaneous desire and joy as we learn to love with fewer conditions. This can eventually expand into a love for all God's creation.

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So love, when seen in the context of the Holy Spirit awakening us, gradually reaches out and finds ever wider and greater unities. This means we are transcending our self more and more. We become increasingly more authentic (acting from our deepest purpose) and less ego driven.

We see this drama played out in the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary. The angel Gabriel is the divine messenger bringing the announcement of the divine presence alive within Mary. Remember Gabriel's words to her (because they are meant for us also): "Do not be afraid, for you have won God's favor..." (Luke 1:31). In their dialogue Mary is brought to the point of acceptance, "Let it be done to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

And that acceptance soon blossoms into joy: "My soul magnifies the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior..." (Luke 1:46). Peace and letting go of fear comes with surrendering our ego and its need for specific outcomes. This peace turns into a sense of aliveness when we actually enjoy what we are doing. Enjoyment replaces wanting as the motivating power behind our actions. Wanting arises from the ego's delusion that we are a separate fragment that is disconnected from the power that lies behind all creation. Through enjoyment, we link into that universal creative power itself.

Don't ask your mind for permission to enjoy what you do. All you will get is plenty of reasons why you can't enjoy it. Joy does not come from what you do, it flows into what you do and thus into this world from the Presence deep within you.

You will enjoy an activity in which you are fully present, any activity that is not just a means to an end. It isn't the action you perform that you really enjoy, but the deep sense of aliveness that flows into it. That aliveness is one with who you are. This means that when you enjoy doing something, you are really experiencing joy of Divine Presence in its dynamic aspect. That's why anything you bring your presence to connects you to the Creator.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

I guess I'm still stuck on Christmas. My tree is still up and I light it every night. And I like to play the song "The Little Drummer Boy" at least once a day. It's one of my favorite Christmas songs, mostly because of the story.

"The Little Drummer Boy" is about a young boy who has no gift to give the infant Jesus. But he does have his drums. And that, of course, is enough.

It is enough at least for God and for little children. But is it enough for you and me? Children seem to be able to accept being loved for who they are. A little girl showed me her drawing after Mass and when I said it was "beautiful" she agreed. No hesitation.

It's not so simple for us adults. We're used to earning our way and making our place in life. We've grown out of our innocence and the humble acceptance of love that was one of innocence's charms – as well as virtues.

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Christmas returns us to that innocence, if but for a few brief flickering moments. Christmas decorations are lavishly outlandish. There are more sweet, comforting cookies and candies than we adults should indulge in. We can be both depressed and overwhelmed by the burden of Christmas and at the same time excited by the hope of God reaching out to us. Our expectations can be our downfall and in that they can lead us to the possibilities we seek most deeply. Christmas is about gifts and the heart and soul of our existence is a gift of Love creating us over and over again at every moment. To enjoy this gift, however, we need humble gratitude. We need to be able to accept a love that we have not and cannot earn.

This humility is the secrete ingredient that makes all of our virtues real. Without humility faith is rigid and ungrounded. It remains literal, simplistic and self-righteous. Without humility love is nothing more than enlightened self-interest. Love becomes a way of being perfect, of fulfilling commandments and never finds its reliance on God as its source. Without humility hope is self-indulgent. It is the belief that God exists to fulfill our expectations rather than knowing our role as God's expectation.

Faith, with humility, becomes a letting go of words and definitions to trust the God who is our only possibility. Love, with humility, receives Love as its source. This is a love that comes only from relationship to God as the possibility of our loving in return. Hope, with humility, knows that our visions and dreams are far too small for God's ways and so hope means letting go of our hopes to participate in God's vision. Humility reminds us that we are much more than our best aspirations and our worst flaws. We are gifted as an expression of Trinity's love.

Humility is an unflinching interior gaze that recognizes our gifts (gifts as given and as something we uniquely contribute by our person) and limitations, goodness and sin, soul and ego. We are all of this and loved as all of this – because this is the only way we can be our self.

Humility comes with the recognition and experience that we exist because of relationships.

We exist as a gift, as a choice of the God who gives us. Humility is an awakening – not simply an understanding – but an awakening to the reality of who we are. We are because of our relationship to God.

If we think about it, with all of our adult practicality, What more do we have to offer to God? We can call our offering virtue, or justice, stewardship or duty, but it all comes down to something much simpler than the words infer. It is simply what we have to bring. And this was given to us by God. And all that God really wants is us, the innocent, little being that lives behind all our adult posturing.

But words are getting in the way here. I like to remind myself of these ideas. They make my reality clearer but The Little Drummer Boy touches my heart beyond the ideas and awakens me to something simpler and far greater than I could expect. I have no gift to offer, ta rum pa pa rum. All I have is a desire to respond to the gift of love that lays before me as an innocent child.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

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Christmas Blessings

On these cold and blustery winter days my Mother had hot chocolate brewing on the stove when we came home from school. She patiently watched the milk as it warmed and then she'd stir in four heaping spoons of Nestle's Quick or Hershey's syrup. Now here's a sign of aging, I remember when the only marshmallow were the big ones, not the tiny ones we can get now. We suffered through the inconvenience of massive marshmallows.

In the last four weeks of Advent God has been patiently warming us up. Today is the day when God puts in the chocolate, or as the Gospel puts it, makes us children of God. The Word became flesh and now becomes flesh over and over again in our lives. Today we celebrate the grace of our humanness filled with the divine – this is how God saves.

I hope you've had a chance to enjoy whatever gets you in the mood for the wonder of Christmas. This is not a time to reject or refuse the things that give us comfort, beauty, or simply entertain us. It is a time to savor the gifts and cards that remind us of the people who care. God saves us through our humanness, through one another. There's blessedness in the extravagance and sentimentality of this season.

The "Word became flesh", became human. God saves us in our humanness. Today we take time to soak in the reality of what's happening. We listen to the music, the beauty of the church, the sharing of sacred bread and wine and realize that these are the ways God gets through to us. These are the ways God stirs divinity into our lives.

My youngest sister Kathy was born when I was in 8th grade. I remember holding her. She was so small and so trusting. I could feel her breathing and loved her so much. I would do anything to protect her. Its just came naturally from her and flowed through me.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God become a baby, the word through whom the whole universe was created became a helpless child. The infinite vastness of creation became a word so that God could get through to us. God became a vulnerable child to open our hearts. In Jesus we find that God will do anything to get through our defenses. This day is soaked in God. But the greatest gift is still to come. The divine is being stirred into our being and this day is the time to savor this mystery – not just gulp it down.

What is needed is our willingness to let God in. Our willingness is the milk to God's divine chocolate. In the moments of quiet or joy you will feel the joy of God's thrill. God just loves to look into your eyes, hug you from inside and be yours. Like all good parents God's desires are pretty simple.

The Gospels tell us that God made angels. And I'm sure that God loves them. But how do you tell angels apart? They're so spiritual. It's obvious that we are all different, one from another. Each one of us is unique and God's thrill is when we let God turn us into hot chocolate.

Blessed is your Christmas. May you enjoy the divine gift.

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