

CHRISTMAS EVE THOUGHTS

Some years it's harder to get to Christmas Eve than others, by which I mean that it's been a hard year and especially a hard last several weeks for most of us. Not that there haven't been lots of hard years before, in our lives and in ages past. But it had seemed that things were looking up in the world after 8 years of stability and growth without any scandals in the White House. Isn't it just like the universe to throw us a curve, thrusting us back into uncertainty, fear, and chaos? Of course human history is full of just that kind of change, always a trickster ready to jump in and muck things up! So it has been hard to get into a Christmas Eve mood, hard to get the decorations up, hard to shop for presents, hard to feel celebrative. And yet, here we are at Christmas Eve already, with its miraculous story, the star, and the Christmas Carols.

When I was growing up, the Candlelight Christmas Eve service was my absolute favorite time to be at church. I loved singing the Christmas Carols, especially the ones we sang by candlelight. Back then, I liked the cold weather, and it was especially good if we had snow, because that was the way Christmas Eve should be celebrated! It was a magical time, and the story of Jesus born in a manger was a magical story, attended by angels, shepherds, a star, wise men--the ultimate religious rags to riches story. And after the service, we would drive around looking at Christmas Lights before going home for hot chocolate, alcohol free egg nog and maybe opening one or two presents. Between church and home, Christmas Eve was the best of times.

Maybe I've become too much of a curmudgeon, too much of a Grinch, to get beyond the current geo-political situation. Even during the Cold War and the Vietnam years and even during the Iraq and Afghan wars, it was easier to put those challenges aside for one night. Why is it so hard to ignore Trump's threats to increase Nuclear Weapons, take away affordable insurance, list Muslims, and turn away immigrants? Why even listen to someone who so easily forgets promises? I'm sure it is only the fear, the fear that he will actually do some of the things he threatened. What if he actually succeeds and is able to do to Blacks, Latinos, Muslims, women, the disabled, and the poor what he has threatened.

We need the miraculous magical hope of Christmas more even than in so many other dark years. We need to be saved from our own electoral folly. We need a champion who will rise up to challenge the power of the billionaires, someone who really does understand the plight of the poor, the disabled, women, minorities, and even the middle class. Come forth Messiah, and speak truth to power, come and bring hope to the people, come forth and lead us back into the Promised Land of justice, compassion, and equality!

I understand what the Jews hoped for over so many years, a Kingly Messiah to conquer evil and restore justice. Jesus never was that kind of a Messiah, more like a do-it-yourself Messiah showing people how to create justice with compassion. Paul and centuries of Christianity have cast him as much more, but in his time he taught by example, inspired people to follow in his footsteps creating justice out of loving action, accepting the unacceptable, reaching out to even women and Samaritans and tax collectors.

On the night that Jesus was born, something special happened. Yes, the star, angels, shepherds, wise men and even the story of his birth in a stable at the solstice were all added decades or more later, but something special happened that people later wanted to celebrate with a real party. A child was born out of love who grew up to love everyone enough to instruct the Pharisees and Sadducees, enough to fish with the fishermen, enough to talk to foreign women, enough to start a revolution in religious thought.

Christmas is the celebration of Divine Love coming into the world as a child to offer love, acceptance, joy, and hope to all people. It was never about historical facts, it was always about magic and miracle, an archetypal story. The test of Christmas belief is not whether we believe Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem on December 25th of the zero year of our calendar. The test is whether we hold joy, love, and hope in our hearts. The blessing of Christmas is for people of good will to share justice and love throughout the earth, accepting others, caring for others, and living lives full of Joy, Love, and Hope!

May we live the coming year with Joy, Love, and Hope that will carry us through even the darkest times and bring us together often until we celebrate Christmas again next year, not just here, not just in Jerusalem, but everywhere that people gather throughout the universe!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, Om, and Amen!
Merry Christmas!