

Christmas Day, 2010

John's gospel

Today's gospel from John is very different than the Lukan story we told last night. In some ways it seems at a far remove from us and some may like it that way for in some ways it restores a balance of human/divine that church fathers struggled over to frame the creeds. This high Christology of John is paired with the human child in a manger. Too often our pageants and our carols we neglect one for the other or promote only part of the story as led by the starring texts as were the Magi.

In a meditation written by Giovanni Papini translated in 1925 I found not only a birth story but a resurrection one as well – a needed balance in my theology but also a holding together of the who story not just the parts we like or gravitate toward. Here is some of what he says:

Jesus was born in a real stable, a house which is the prison of those animals who work for man. The poor old stable of Christ's poor old country is a dirty pavement, four rough walls, a roof of beams and slate. It is dark and reeking and the only clean thing in it is the manger where the owner piles hay and fodder.

The hay had come from the spring grasses which were dragged, spent, into the barn by late summer. The animals in the barn process it so that it returns to the earth having passed through them. This is the real stable where Jesus was born, the filthiest place in the world was the first room of the only pure man born of a woman; the Son of Man, who himself would be devoured by wild beasts calling themselves men, had his first cradle the manger where the miraculous flowers of spring were chewed as the cud of animals.

It was not by chance that Christ was born in a stable on earth where we know humanity repeatedly spoils that which is pure. Upon this earthly floor nor perfumes or decorations can mask its distance from the cosmos; this is where Jesus came in innocence.

First to worship him were animals not humans and among the latter he sought out the simple hearted and always children. He did not come to bow down to material things nor to rule over others. He will ride into Jerusalem on the back of an ass where those who reject him will try to put an end to him.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, John's gospel lifts our gaze beyond our meanness and the lowliness of his coming and invites us to hold the One who has from the beginning of all things held us.

"For a miracle, take one shepherd's sheepskin

Throw in a pinch of now, a grain of long ago, and a handful of tomorrow

Add by eye a little chunk of space, a piece of sky and it will happen.

For miracles, gravitating to earth, know just where people will be waiting,

And eagerly will find the right address and tenant even in a wilderness.

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<sup>1</sup> Papini, Giovanni, "Ox and Ass," Watch for the Light, 2001. Plough Publ.

Or, if you're leaving home, switch on a new four-pointed star,  
Then as you say adieu, to light a vacant world with steady blaze  
And follow you forever with its gaze."<sup>2</sup>

May Heaven and Earth hold you today in God's loving gift of the Christ. Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera

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<sup>2</sup> Brodsky, Joseph, *Nativity Poems*, 2001, Farrar, Straus and Giroux