

## The Unexpected Messiah

The Jewish people in Jesus's day expected a Messiah who would be a warrior king.

They expected a Messiah who would fight the Romans and kick them out of Israel.

They expected sound and fury and loud noises.

They expected to become "somebodies" in this world.

Today, we sit in the ninth month of pandemic.

Travel restrictions everywhere.

Many schools closed.

And life as we used to know it is so different.

I wonder if we too seem to hope for a Messiah to come on the clouds of heaven and fix everything.

But with Jesus, then and now, what we get is an unexpected Messiah.

What we get is a Messiah who comes to us not in a fighter jet nor on the clouds of heaven, but a Messiah born in a stable.

A Messiah who might as well have been born at Kapi'olani hospital.

A Messiah who meets us where we are.

As we are.

For who we are.

As the poet says,

The night is still dark,  
And a procession of Herods still terrorize the earth,  
Killing the children to stay in power.  
The world still knows its Herods,  
but it also still knows men and women  
Who pack their dreams safely in their hearts,  
And set off toward Bethlehem, faithful against all odds,  
Undeterred by fatigue or rejection,  
To kneel to a child.

And the world still knows those persons  
Wise enough  
To follow a star,  
Those who do not consider themselves  
Too intelligent  
Too powerful  
Too wealthy  
To kneel to a child.

And the world still knows those hearts so humble  
That they're ready  
To hear the word of a song  
And to leave what they have, to go  
To kneel to a child.

The night is still dark,  
But by the light of the star,  
Even today  
We can see

To kneel to a child.

-Ann Weems

And so, even if we find ourselves gazing into the heavens to seek God, Christmas reminds us that God is found in the everyday marvels of everyday life.

That Immanuel, "God With Us" means just that.

Jesus is here, today, now, in the face of every human person, most especially in the faces of the least, the lost and the left behind.

Christmas is that urgent wake up call, that stick in the ribs reminder that the great call of our faith isn't about rules or even rituals.

Christmas is a reminder that the rules and rituals are fingers pointing to the moon, they are not the moon itself.

Christmas is a reminder that the great call of our faith is to enter into the larger mind of God.

It's coming to see that our task in this life is to heal, to mend, to restore the good creation and the good relationships God wishes for each and every one of us.

Christmas is like the story of two lifelong friends, call them Joe and Charlie, who've lived next to each other for what seems like a hundred years.

Both men lost their wives.

The children have moved away.

All they have is each other.

Until one day they get into an argument over a stray calf that's wandered onto Joe's land and Joe decides to keep it.

Charlie thinks the calf has his brand on it, making it his.

The men argue, then yell, then stomp away to their own corners.

Charlie decides to plow a wide swath in the land between their properties, right up to the lip of the big lake nearby.

The plowed area turns into a river, water rushing down in torrents.

Joe hears a knock at his door.

And there stands a fellow, who says he's a carpenter, looking for work.

Joe hires him on the spot to build a fence on his side of the new river that Charlie made, since a fence and a river will surely keep Charlie out.

The carpenter gets to work.

He works through the day and well into the night.

At dawn, Joe goes out to inspect the work.

And lo and behold, what does he see?

Instead of a fence, the carpenter has built a bridge over the river that Charlie made.

And what's more, here comes Charlie, walking over that bridge, hands outstretched, weeping, apologizing, as he and Joe embrace in a friendship made new.

The men ask the carpenter to stick around.

'We've got lots of work to keep you busy!'

But he declines.

"I've got to get going.

There are so many bridges that still need to be built!" E. Pearmain, *Doorways to the Soul*, 59, modified.

In a way, Christmas is about bridge building.

Between God and humanity for sure.

But also between us.

Within our families.

Between our neighbors.

And especially, between all human beings.

All races.

All classes.

All ethnicities.

Even all political persuasions!

And of course, in our relationship with creation.

Particularly with our fragile planet and the many forms of life that depend on her.

Perhaps this Christmas will find you building a bridge where a river or fence now stands.

Who do you miss?

Who do you think of when your thoughts turn to making things right?

When you think about letting go of the past?

When you ponder whether it's possible to build a new future in the short time we are each of us given?

And as we ponder these questions, can we pause and be still, and kneel before the child?

"Who knew this child's birth would still be remembered 2000 years later?"

Who knew the power of the angels words, spoken so long ago to Mary, would shape the course of centuries to come?

Did Mary and Joseph foresee what the future held, as shepherds gathered that star filled night?

Let's gaze once again into the manger this morning.

Come!

Let us kneel for awhile before this child." R. Hunter, Starry Black Night, modified.

This unexpected Messiah.

Who brings healing and hope to those with open hearts.

To those with open hands.

Thanks be to God!

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