

The Possibility of Redemption

How do we live this “pre-Christmas” time and Christmas itself in a way that brings us closer to being like the one whose birth we will celebrate? Regardless of what your religious persuasion might be or even if you have separated yourself from organized religion, there is something different and even peculiar about this season more than other times of year. We idolize those without power: children. We praise generosity and kindness and good cheer. We reach out to people we rarely see, and we gather with family and friends, even those who get on our nerves. We entertain thoughts that there is something better than the present circumstances, that peace is preferable and possible, that goodness can win out.

Is it silly to celebrate the birth of Jesus in this day and age? Is it ridiculous to speak of love and peace and good will in an increasingly hard-edged world? Public life has become characterized by divisions and struggles. There is a certain soullessness about our time that is disturbing. Violence is often the background tune to our lives. Uncertainty is a constant emotional state. Fear is a prime motivator. Anger has become the principal passion. Relationships are reduced to lust. Survival is our main benchmark. Powerlessness has become what is shared by most people in the world, powerlessness in the face of forces that are beyond us, forces that are oftentimes evil.

If one were to scan the conditions and challenges facing the country and the globe, it is not a stretch to say that this is a dark time. Even so, there are many who would believe in the possibility of redemption, who would join the many generations across the centuries who dared to hope even in the most dismal times. Back in the 15th century, for example, they first sang, “... it came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night.” (*Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming* go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPtqk9S4wK8>) We are deep into the night in our own time. It must have felt just as dark back when they wrote that song. After all, they had just gone through what we call the “Dark Ages” and, for most, life was harsh. Yet, they believed, they hoped; the “floweret bright” was Jesus.

If we are, in fact, living in a mean-spirited time; if the common spiritual currency is emptiness; if we are, in truth, most desperately in need of salvation, then Christmastime is the perfect season for our world. These days can afford us a certain spiritual energy, equipping us to engage the evil that surrounds us and to live lives of virtue, as individuals and as communities, in order to expand that most profound reality first glimpsed in a stable, the divinization of the world. These weeks remain a special and happy time because during this season we celebrate what is fragile: our relationships, our virtues, our dreams, our struggles to love. By doing so, we display our hope. Hope that, like at the manger, we find God among us.