

## A God Who is Way Too Human

Christmas music is my drug of choice. Every year I make a playlist for that Christmastime, and I start listening to the selections long before I should. This practice is not as reproachable as the appearance of Christmas items for sale in stores just after Halloween, but I should show more musical and seasonal restraint.

Something about a few of the songs struck me as odd more this year than in the past. Give a listen if you have a few minutes to *How Far Is It to Bethlehem?* (go to: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgHmz0A-Lfc&list=RDlgHmz0A-Lfc&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgHmz0A-Lfc&list=RDlgHmz0A-Lfc&start_radio=1)) It is about some children visiting the newborn Jesus. The children want to pet the animals in the stable and touch Jesus' hand. They have apparently traveled some distance to see Jesus, and so his mother tells them to lay down and sleep ("For all weary children, Mary must weep. Here, on his bed of straw, sleep, children, sleep.") But then the next line is astonishing if not somewhat disturbing: "God is in His mother's arms ..."

What?! Are we talking about the God I think we're talking about? The One who created everything that exists? The One reputed to be all-powerful and all-knowing? The One who, even though imagined and worshipped in many and varied ways by every culture, has been recognized by all as residing in deep mystery that elicits awe if not fear? Now, this One is being cradled in his mother's arms?

*In the Bleak Midwinter* (go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yb9tHjuy9Hw>) again brings us to the stable, highlighting the fact that this shelter sufficed for a God whom Heaven and Earth cannot contain. The carol goes on to say that even though choirs of angels might worship him night and day, Jesus was content with "a breastful of milk." The next verse humanizes the Almighty even further, emphasizing that while archangels, cherubim, and seraphim may have been hovering overhead to adore Jesus, "only his mother worshipped the Beloved with a kiss."

What are we to make of this seeming reduction of God? Having the Divine be a person, especially one born into such mean circumstances, seems off somehow, especially if this person was to be tasked with redeeming what God had created, restoring the original goodness intended by God. The depictions of Jesus and the manner of his birth in Christmas carols such as the ones quoted only serve to further this diminishment of God.

Rather than this birth representing a diminishment of God, I see it as an enlargement of humanity. St. Paul expresses it rather starkly when he wrote, "For our sakes God made him who did not know sin to be sin, so that in him *we might become the very holiness of God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21) In other words, our humanity has the capacity to become divinized. While we may think of our "humanness" as being flawed, base, even capable of evil, this birth that we anticipate celebrating tells us that this humanness can contain the divine.

Does this not encourage us to imagine that we are capable of so much more goodness, of acting in ways that are redemptive of the worlds, small and large, in which we live? Believing that God was a small and vulnerable infant being kissed and nurtured by his mother is difficult, and maybe it is just as difficult to believe that ordinary people such as us can be dwelling places for God, but that is the challenge and the promise of this time of year.