

“CHRISTMAS EVE”:

REFLECTIONS FOR SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2011 BY THALIA JOHNSON.

LUKE 2:1-14

BRING US CLOSER TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS, OVER AND OVER, UNTIL WE REFLECT THE REALITY OF DIVINE PRESENCE IN ALL WE MEET. AMEN.

MY FAVORITE STORY OF A CHILDRENS’ CHRISTMAS PROGRAM TOOK PLACE OVER 35 YEARS AGO AND INVOLVED THE DAUGHTER OF A CHILDHOOD FRIEND. DETAILS ARE FADING OVER THE YEARS, AND I KNOW THE STORY ONLY FROM ITS TELLING.

THIS 3 YEAR OLD WAS PORTRAYING MARY IN THE CHURCH PROGRAM. JESUS WAS A DOLL BELONGING TO ANOTHER LITTLE GIRL, WHO WAS ONE OF THE ANGELS. ALL WENT WELL WITH PROCESSIONS AND GETTING EVERYONE IN PLACE.

AND THEN THE ACTION TOOK A SURPRISING TURN, WHEN THE ANGEL CAME DOWN OUT OF HER PLACE IN THE BACK, PICKED UP HER JESUS FROM THE MANGER, AND TOOK HIM BACK TO HER PLACE TO HOLD HIM.

MARY DIDN’T TAKE LONG TO GET UP OUT OF HER SEATED POSITION, GO UP TO THE ANGEL , TAKE JESUS AND PUT HIM BACK INTO THE MANGER, KNEELING BESIDE HIM.

THE ANGEL CAME DOWN AGAIN, PICKED UP HER JESUS, CRADLING HIM IN HER ARMS, BACK TO HER SPOT IN THE BACK. MARY RETRIEVED HIM AND PUT HIM BACK IN THE MANGER.

ALL OF THIS IS TAKING PLACE IN COMPLETE SILENCE.

A THIRD TIME, THE ANGEL CAME DOWN CARRYING JESUS WITH HER TO THE RANK OF ANGELS. MARY WITH A DECIDELY MORE DETERMINED AURA WENT TO THE ANGEL, STARED AT HER FOR WHAT SEEMED A LONG TIME, AND WHILE STARING TOOK JESUS, WALKED BACK DOWN TO THE MANGER, AND VERY ASSERTIVELY PLACED HIM WITH EMPHASIS BACK IN THE MANGER. SHE THEN CONTINUED STARING AT THE ANGEL....WHO DECIDED TO STAY IN PLACE.

IT HAS OCCURRED TO ME THIS YEAR THAT THIS ADVENTURE REFLECTS THE ONGOING STRUGGLE TO PUT JESUS IN OUR OWN BOXES....TO PUT THE DIVINE IN BOXES WE CHOOSE....TO PUT WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE RIGHT, TRUE, JUST, MORAL, EQUITABLE, AND GOOD IN WHAT WE FEEL IS THE PROPER POSITION.

AND YET, THE OLD STATEMENT THAT GOD SENT JESUS TO HELP US FIND BETTER

WAYS OF TREATING EACH OTHER, SAYS LIVING IS NOT ABOUT FINDING BOXES OR SYSTEMS OF POWER.

THE POWER DYNAMICS IN WASHINGTON DC, THIS PAST WEEK, RELATING TO THE PAYROLL TAX CUT LEGISLATION, AND IN LANSING, RELATING TO THE LEGISLATION TAKING AWAY MOST PARTNER BENEFITS, ARE ENOUGH TO MAKE US WONDER IF ANY OF THOSE INVOLVED ARE ACTING OUT OF AWARENESS OF THE COMMON GOOD.

IN THE MIDST OF THAT OFTEN FUTILE WONDERING, THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS IS TO AGAIN FIND WAYS TO RENEW OUR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CONNECTIONS AT ALL LEVELS. THIS BOY CHILD, JESUS, BORN SO LONG AGO, SOMEHOW MADE SUCH A DIFFERENCE, THAT THE STORY ITSELF IS NOW POWER OF UNBELIEVABLE MAGNITUDE.

THE MOST OBVIOUS EXAMPLE OF THAT REALITY IS THIS COMBINATION OF PEOPLE GATHERED HERE TONIGHT TO CELEBRATE THE INCARNATION...AT INCARNATION. THE JESUS STORY, THE DESIRE TO SEEK AND SERVE CHRIST IN ALL WE MEET, IS WHAT HAS PULLED US TOGETHER.

IF WE NOW ASKED THE QUESTION, WHERE WERE YOU 30 YEARS AGO, HOW MANY OF US WOULD HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER OR BEEN IN THE SAME PLACE? WE EACH COULD PROBABLY ONLY NAME, AT MOST, A FEW. YET WE ARE NOW CONNECTED - AMAZINGLY, UNBELIEVABLY, TOGETHER IN A TOTALLY UNIQUE COMMUNITY. I'M GUESSING WE ALSO HAVE DONE, OVER THOSE ARBITRARY 30 YEARS AND CONTINUE TO DO, THINGS NEVER POSSIBLE TO IMAGINE THEN.

THOSE OF US OLD ENOUGH TO HAVE EXPERIENCED WATCHING A GENERATION OR TWO ENTER THIS WORLD AND GROW INTO ADULTHOOD, ARE MESMERIZED BY THE CHANGES THEY BRING....AND BY THE RESULTING CHANGES IN OURSELVES.

WE STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND JESUS'S, DIVINITY, AND SPIRITUAL REALITIES. WE STRUGGLE TO FIND STANDARDS, BY WHICH TO LIVE OUR LIVES AND MAKE DECISIONS; WE STRUGGLE WITH OTHERS, TRYING TO DO THE SAME THINGS, THAT COME TO DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDINGS THAN OURS. WE AGONIZE OVER THE TRAGIC EVENTS EVOLVING FROM THAT STRUGGLE.

IT'S A ROCKY ROAD, ANYTHING BUT THE LEVEL, SMOOTH PATH.

TONIGHT, THOUGH, ALL OVER THE WORLD, PEOPLE ARE GATHERED, SOME SINGING THE SAME SONGS WE ARE SINGING, SOME RECITING WITH DEEP MEANING,

THE SAME SACRAMENTAL WORDS AND PRAYERS. IN MANY PLACES, THOSE OF DIFFERENT FAITHS SEND THEIR HEARTFELT WISHES FOR COMMON HAPPINESS AND JOY. WE DO THE SAME FOR THEM.

THE EXPERIENCE OF JESUS, HOWEVER THAT HAS HAPPENED, IS A COMMON THREAD FOR HOPE IN THE CONTINUED EVOLUTION OF DECENCY, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

I AM QUITE FASCINATED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF BETTER UNDERSTANDING OUR CONNECTIONS. WE KNOW THAT THOUGHTS, IDEAS, WRITINGS, ART, MUSIC AND COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE ARE SHARED, AND HOW THEY ARE PHYSICALLY SHARED THROUGH OUR SENSES.

ALONG WITH OTHERS, I ALSO HAVE BEEN RAISED IN A CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY THAT SAYS WE ARE CONNECTED BY PRAYER AND BLESSING. HOW AND WHEN THAT SEEMS TO WORK IS FAR MORE A MYSTERY. INDIVIDUAL AND COMMON FAITH IS A MYSTERY – YET AGAIN, THROUGH IT, WE ARE CONNECTED.

WHAT WE THINK, DO AND SAY, AFFECTS OTHERS. WE ARE AFFECTED BY WHAT OTHERS THINK, DO AND SAY. OUR PRAYERS AND RENEWED FAITH PROMISES IDENTIFY THE JESUS, THE HOLY SPIRIT, IN EACH OF US, AS THE MAGNET THAT DRAWS US TOGETHER. THE NAME OR TERMINOLOGY INVOLVED DOESN'T MATTER AS MUCH AS THE REALITY.

MY FAVORITE CLASS, IN STUDYING TO BE A DEACON, WAS PROCESS THEOLOGY. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I WAS EXPOSED TO THE COMBINING OF PHYSICS AND THEOLOGY. THERE I LEARNED TO RETHINK MY PERCEPTION OF THE MEANING OF SOLID. A TABLE IS NOT JUST AN INERT MASS. IT IS MADE OF MANY TINY PARTICLES MOVING SO FAST IN SO MANY DIRECTIONS, THAT IT APPEARS TO BE SOLID. AT THAT POINT I THINK QUARKS WERE MENTIONED.

EVEN THE TINIEST PARTICLE INTERACTS WITH AND AFFECTS THE PARTICLES NEAR IT. WHERE THEY ALL GO, OR WHETHER THEY STAY IN A RELATIVELY SMALL AREA, IS STILL A MYSTERY TO ME.

FROM THAT CLASS I BEGAN IMAGINING THOUGHTS, WORDS, SOUNDS, AND PICTURES AS THE TINY PARTICLES FORMING TOGETHER IN SOPHISTICATED WAYS TO TRANSFER INFORMATION AND ESSENCE. I IMAGINE THEM ABLE TO GO ANYWHERE AT ANYTIME.

THE CONCEPT OF SUBJECTIVE IMMEDIACY WAS PART OF THAT. AT THE ABSOLUTE MOMENT OF AN INTERACTION, WE CANNOT KNOW THE RESULT – THAT'S THE SUBJECTIVE IMMEDIACY. OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE IS ONLY AVAILABLE

AFTERWARDS.

AGAIN, IN MY IMAGINING, THAT FITS MY PERCEPTION THAT, WHAT WE CHOOSE TO DO, THE DECISIONS WE MAKE, ARE IMPORTANT, AND AFFECT OTHERS. WE ARE HERE TO DO THE BEST WE CAN IN OUR INTERACTIONS...IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE TO THE COMMON GOOD. THE MOMENT MATTERS!

IT ALSO FITS MY PERCEPTIONS THAT I CAN MAKE CORRECTIONS. THERE IS ALWAYS INFINITE POSSIBILITY FOR CHANGE, FOR HOPE.

THIS WAS ALL PART OF AN INTEREST IN MUSIC AND HEALING. THE PHYSICS STARTED MAKING SENSE, ALONG WITH THE MYSTERY IN BEING AFFECTED BY MUSIC. ITS BEEN HELPFUL IN DEALING WITH STRESS, SURGERY AND LEARNING. QUARKS RUNNING ALL OVER THE PLACE TRANSPORTING THE SOUNDS.

I ALSO FOLLOWED RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF PRAYER, OVER 20 YEARS AGO. IN BLIND STUDIES, WHERE PEOPLE WERE PRAYED FOR BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER SURGICAL PROCEDURES, HEALING WAS FASTER AND MORE COMPLETE TO A LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE. THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE INVOLVED, OR THE TYPE OF PRAYER, DID NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE. MORE QUARKS IN ACTION.

OUR CONNECTIONS TO EACH OTHER, OUR ABILITY TO SHARE THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN US, IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE UNDERSTANDABLE...AND BELIEVABLE.

RECENTLY WE HAVE EVIDENCE THAT SHOWS THE POSSIBILITY OF EVEN MORE PARTICLES....INCLUDING THE FUNDAMENTAL PARTICLE THAT HAS BEEN THEORIZED BY MATHEMATICIANS AND SCIENTISTS FOR SOME TIME. ALISON HINE SHARED THIS INFORMATION IN AN EMAIL. NPR HAD A PROGRAM ON IT AT THE SAME TIME.

THE HIGGS BOSON IS A HYPOTHETICAL ELEMENTARY PARTICLE THAT'S BEEN PREDICTED TO EXIST, AND RECENT EXPERIMENTS USING THE LARGE HADRON COLLIDER ARE SHOWING THAT IT INDEED MIGHT EXIST.

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE ARTICLES THAT EXPLAIN THIS. ONE STATEMENT, THOUGH, THAT DID HELP, SAID THAT "THE HIGGS FIELD CAN BE PICTURED AS A POOL OF MOLASSES THAT 'STICKS' TO THE OTHERWISE MASSLESS FUNDAMENTAL PARTICLES THAT TRAVEL THROUGH THE FIELD, CONVERTING THEM INTO PARTICLES WITH MASS THAT FORM (FOR EXAMPLE) THE COMPONENTS OF ATOMS."

IN ADDITION TO THIS NEW POSSIBLE PARTICLE AND QUARKS, THERE ARE PHOTONS, LEPTONS AND GLUONS. AGAIN, I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THEY WORK, OR EVEN WHAT THEY REALLY ARE....HOWEVER, THE REALITY OF THE SOULNESS AND THE SPIRIT OF EACH BEING IS A BIT CLOSER TO UNDERSTANDING.

ITS PROBABLY NOT UNLIKE THE MYSTERY THE SHEPHERDS FELT WHEN FIRST HEARING OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS, THE MESSIAH, THE CHILD OF GOD.

THE TERM "FUNDAMENTAL PARTICLE" SOUNDS SIMPLE. HOWEVER, THE INCREDIBLE COMPLEXITY OF LIFE AND THE UNIVERSE INCREASES WITH EACH NEW FINDING. THE COMPLEXITY OF JESUS CONTINUES TO INCREASE. JESUS CANNOT BE CONTAINED IN ANYONE'S BOX.

JESUS QUARKS ARE BOUNCING MORE FREQUENTLY AND STRONGER THAN EVER. THEY'VE HAD MORE TIME TO BE ACTIVE. THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER, MORE CONNECTED VIA TECHNOLOGY THAN EVER, SHARING THOUGHTS, FEELINGS AND IDEAS.

I AM MORE EXCITED ABOUT THE PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE IN THE WORLD THAN EVER. THE STORY OF JESUS, HIS BEGINNING, WHO HE CAME TO SERVE, AND HOW HE LIVED IS MORE VITAL THAN EVER.

TONIGHT WE CELEBRATE THAT CHILD, AND HOW WE LIVE INTO THE STORY.

AMEN. ALLELUIA.