

Christmas Eve Meditation

December 24, 2007

*It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold.*

*“Peace on the earth, goodwill to all
From heav’ns all gracious King”;
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.*

During this special time of year, we are surrounded with familiar carols we have sung since we were children. On this special Eve, in most churches, we work our lungs and voices as we move through a traditional service of lessons and carols. And we love it, or we would not be here. But often in our vocalizations we miss the message of peace almost every carol brings to us. We do not hear what it was and is the angels sing. Perhaps, there is not quite enough “solemn stillness” around us and within us to truly get the message.

A friend sent me an editorial from the *Providence Journal* written by Rabbi Leslie Gutterman. While the rabbi’s focus was on telling the story of Hanukkah, what he said applies to people and all faiths. He noted that it is “not by might or by power that change comes about but by the Spirit of God. He also noted that it “takes intention and time to embrace ideals of the spirit.”

Our Christmas story of the baby in the manger shows us that it is really not by power or might that things come about but by the spirit of God. That same spirit that moved across the water at creation and that stirs our hearts and souls and minds at this special time of year when we are more generous, caring beings.

Emily Dickinson wrote, “The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.” Nothing can force us into the frame of mind we find ourselves in this evening, we seem to come to it naturally, moved by a sense that something happened to change our world many years ago. Our souls are standing open and ready to embrace something full of wonder. The birth of a special child, like us, yet very different, changed the way people think and act toward one another. Knowing the stories of Jesus often makes us stop and reflect on the way we are living and causes us to change things for the better.

Even though people did not understand the angels’ song then, and still do not fully grasp it,

*Still through the cloven skies they come,
 With peaceful wings unfurled,
 And still their heav'ly music floats O'er all the weary world.
 Above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hovering wing,
 And ever over its Babel sounds The blessed angels sing.*

Persistence is the game of the angels and of our Creator. In spite of all the babble with which we surround ourselves, the story of the life and teachings of Christ persists and tries to find a way through our world-weariness and our sometimes cynical natures. Life can be a very difficult thing but there are glimpses of times in which all may be made whole once again.

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load
 Whose forms are bending low,
 Who toil along the climbing way, With painful steps and slow,
 Look now for glad and golden hours
 Come swiftly on the wing; O rest beside the weary road, And hear the angels sing.*

There is hope for each of us as we struggle with life, there is hope for our relationships with one another and for the world in which we live. We must never let go of the hope that does spring eternal in each and every human breast, the hope that was born for us on that Christmas Eve so long ago. We need to seek to build on that hope and to share it with others as we trudge along through life.

While we cannot change everything we may wish to at once, we can begin right where we are in time and space and change those things closest to us remembering that it is “not by might or by power that change comes about but by the spirit of God”—that spirit that dwells within each of us. We need to be patient with our selves and others and know that it takes time to fully embrace the ideals of the spirit. We also need to grant ourselves the time to stop, rest and listen for the angels’ song once again.

*For, lo, the days are hast'ning on, By prophet bards foretold,
 When with the ever-circling years Comes round the age of gold;
 When peace shall o'er all the earth Its ancient splendors fling,
 And all the world send back the song Which now the angels sing.*

-- Amen