

INTRODUCTION

“He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

Recently I heard that line in one of my favorite Christmas songs (“O Holy Night”), and I realized I had never really paid attention to it before: “He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

If you ask several people why Jesus was born into our world, you’ll probably get many different answers. Perhaps a core reason is that, because God became one of us, we know, really know, who we are. We are beloved. We are cherished. We are worth it.

Souls sense their worth when they are loved. God’s presence with us tells us of our worth, and we can offer that gift to others. The movie *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* reminds us how Fred Rogers devoted his life and work to sharing God’s love with every person by reminding them of their inherent dignity and goodness.

“There are no ordinary people,” C.S. Lewis wrote. “You have never talked to a mere mortal....It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry....Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”

During this Advent/Christmas season, the message of the Incarnation proclaims exuberantly to each of us—and to each person with whom we share life in the worldwide family of God—that we are worthwhile.

I pray that during these days you have many moments when you know your value as you also take time to help others feel their worth.

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Busy or Watchful?

Be watchful! Be alert!

MARK 13:33

There's an old joke about an associate pastor who excitedly ran to the pastor's office: "Jesus has returned and is coming up the walk! What should we do?" "Quick!" replies the pastor, "Everybody, look busy!"

Perhaps that's similar to what Jesus says in today's gospel. Yet there also might be a key difference.

It probably wouldn't be difficult to look and be busy during the next month; that seems to be the way our culture lives this season. Many people lament that this is the busiest, most scheduled and hectic time of the year. Instead, our Advent readings emphasize watching and staying alert to the myriad—simple as well as extraordinary—ways God is continually with us. This calls us to quiet and reflection rather than constant busyness.

DAILY PRACTICE To balance this season's busyness with reflection, write out the Christmas story day by day. Luke 2 tells of Jesus' birth from verse 1 to 20. Write down one verse each day of Advent. (Since Advent this year encompasses 26 days, reflect on some lines for two days.) You might do this on a poster in your kitchen or in your journal. Let this time of being alert to the whole story of Jesus' birth call you to be watchful of how you meet Jesus each day.

ADVENT PRAYER *God-with-us, make me attentive to your unceasing presence both in my reflective watchfulness and my harried busyness.*

Using Our Feet

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

ROMANS 10:15

Australian Janelle Boston's dream of climbing Mount Tyson in Queensland seemed to end when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in her 20s. When friends found out about her dream, they asked the local Rugby League if they'd be interested in doing a training run up the mountain, taking Janelle with them. A local welder built a special chair, and forty Rugby volunteers took turns carrying her on the five-hour hike, carefully positioning their feet as they carried her chair on the rugged turns up the mountain.

We often take our feet for granted, but they do so much, including taking us to those in need, helping another to fulfill their dream, and traveling to a new place because someone needs to be affirmed or hear good news. On this feast of St. Andrew, we are reminded that we, too, are called to walk with Jesus, to be his hands and feet in today's world.

DAILY PRACTICE Place one of your shoes next to your bed. Each evening jot down on a small piece of paper a way you were the hands and feet of Jesus during the day. Place them in your shoe.

ADVENT PRAYER *God who always travels with us, inspire me to be your instrument, using the steps of my day to make a difference in the lives of others.*

Dreaming Lavishly

The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb.

ISAIAH 11:6

Often when we read today's Isaiah passage we respond, "Yeah, right. The world (especially today) doesn't work that way."

Isaiah dreamt of a better world, not just of wonderful weather or non-rushed time or many close-by friends. He dreamt of a whole new world where traditional enemies sit down and enjoy each other.

Isaiah's dream of a better world is a God-given dream. The first question for us is: What sort of world do we dream of? The second question is: Are we childlike enough to know that one day our dreams will come true? G.K. Chesterton said there's a reason why Cinderella is younger than her ugly sisters. She has not had time to be hardened by years of routine; she has not swallowed the lie that today has to be exactly the same as yesterday, which has to be exactly the same as the day before that. She has not lost her sense of wonder; she is open to a dream of a miraculous new tomorrow.

DAILY PRACTICE What is your dream for the world? What is one thing you can do to bring it to reality?

ADVENT PRAYER *God of dreamers, enlarge my dreams so they are your visions of peace. Guide my actions so they bring about the peaceable kingdom.*

Multiplying Miracles

He took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds.

MATTHEW 15:36

Leaving church one Sunday morning, a seven-year-old asked her family, “How come Jesus fed the five thousand when they were hungry, and now he lets millions of people go hungry?” Before her parents could answer, their twelve-year-old son responded, “God was in his prime in those days. There were all kinds of miracles when Jesus was alive.”

Perhaps the little girl’s question is the question of many today—in the face of the suffering that happens in much of our world, what is the answer? And her brother’s response hints at our own mission.

The surprising and challenging reality about the Incarnation is not just that God became one of us, but that—because of that gift—we are asked by God to “incarnate” or make known God’s presence in our everyday world. God’s presence, God’s work of multiplying the good, continues in and through *us*. We can make a difference, bringing about a world that abounds with miracles of compassionate caring, reverent respect, and easing of suffering.

DAILY PRACTICE During this month of December, multiply God’s love by doing one additional miracle of caring each day, something you’ve not done before.

ADVENT PRAYER *God of miracles, open my eyes to your wonders surrounding me. Nudge me to be your miraculous presence of love in my world.*