

Christmas Day, 2019, Luke 2:1-20

Christmas, Identity and Meaning

“Once upon a time, a tiny star fell to earth”

That is how the children’s story we heard a few minutes ago begins. It begins with a subtle reference to what Christians understand to be the incarnation of God among us, God for us. As the story proceeds, you may have noticed that the language changes quite quickly, and this divine child, becomes the life of *every* human being, of *any* human being. The singularity of Jesus of Nazareth, of Jesus Christ, drifts, slides, glides into the plurality of us all, as we are born, as we live, as we die, and as we strain forward to resurrection, reintegration into the creation as ‘stars’ once again.

For some, this story may appear a little heretical, a little post-modern, perhaps animist, attributing divinity to all things in the universe, including stars. But that would be too literalist a reading of this children’s story. We need to read it, as many children’s stories, *metaphorically*; and when we do that, we can see the reflection, the mirroring of some real insights, biblical insights about the incarnation, about the Christmas story, which we often miss, ignore, because we read the biblical Christmas story far too lightly, far too superficially. Let us then set ourselves the challenge this morning of underscoring some *converging points* between the children’s story and the biblical story, points that may help us read the Christmas story with more insight.

First, the children’s story makes the point from the very beginning, that being born is about coming into existence without being asked, without being consulted; in other words, being radically dependent upon others who literally form us and shape us. This is exactly one of the insights of the biblical Christmas story: that the beginning of life for the child Jesus, was radically in the hands of others, for better or for worse, and that this is a fundamentally human thing. *In short, just as we have to begin our human journey at some point, vulnerable and exposed, so Jesus Christ, the Lord also had to begin,*

Second, the children’s story makes the point that this child who totally and comprehensively assumes human existence, has meaning and direction: We heard that, “It was caring and kind, and loving and wise...it had family and friends and hopes and dreams”. In the biblical Christmas story, we also gain the sense that it is the meaning and direction of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, that will determine everything, shape history: but moreover, that it is this divine meaning and direction that gives to us, our own sense of meaning. *God’s incarnation in Jesus, his life-style, what he does, provides us with a model, a pattern, a mould, a blueprint to imitate, provides us with as the early Christians would refer to it, “the way”, the way to live.*

Third, the children's story implies throughout, that contrasting identities of divinity and humanness, God-ness and people-ness, are not after all, all that contrasting, all that different. The God-child is like all children and all children are like the God-child. In other words, the idea we often carry, that there is a sharp and total distinction between things divine and things human is not entirely true, not true at all. In the New Testament and in the doctrine of the Christian church, we find a similar powerful insight to that of our children's story. The Christmas story is about the borders, the boundaries between divinity and humanity being overcome. The incarnation is about the translucence between the divine and the human: God taking the initiative to become human, so that we in turn, as human beings may actually become divine.

There is then in the Christmas story, an extraordinarily high view of human beings and of the created world. We and the world of which we are a part, are more than what we modern people allow, certainly much more than what contemporary free market ideas, which measure everything in terms of mere utility, permit. Confined, constrained, imprisoned, by today's crazy economic dogma, which allows us to be no more than consumers, we are killing ourselves, diminishing ourselves quite literally as a nation and planet, to dust and ashes.

In the children's story and in the biblical Christmas story there is a recognition and celebration of our human divinity and dignity, a divinity and dignity which are attached to the real world in which we are immersed, a divinity and dignity which are ultimately God-given, a divinity and dignity which we are invited to *creatively and lovingly take-up, give expression to*.

The open question remains, especially in today's breaking world: how will we respond.

May you enjoy this Christmas day. May you consider the weight of the Christmas story, and think more deeply about what it has to say to a struggling, alienated world.