

12/12/12

"Tis the season to be jolly".... So the song says. But a brief look at the morning paper suggests some at least, have little reason to be jolly. Tuesday two sad funerals in our community highlighted the front page; our hearts go out to both families. Reading further down, there was a fire on H Street that leaves a family homeless. The following day, also on the front page, an apparent sociopath is being charged with murdering one and maiming two others with his car... and the bad news continues page after page with the fiscal cliff looming, middle Eastern unrest, war and rumors of war: including the war that we are still engaged in that has almost faded from sight, except at certain funerals and hospitals.

Fatal  
shootings;  
N. Korean  
missiles  
launched,

In spite of all this, Christmas is coming soon. What can the Christmas season bring to our community and world? Christmas brings *hope*. It's not the hope of escape, but the hope that in the midst of sorrow, a light will shine. We can understand this better if we banish the idea that the birth of Jesus was gushing with sacchariny sentiment like some of the songs say. "Away in a manger no crib for a bed; the little lord Jesus lay down his sweet head. The cattle are lowing the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes." What kind of baby doesn't cry? Especially when they are in a stinking, drafty barn! Of course he cried; and Mary and Joseph would have too, if they had let their hearts be known. A manger birth means that Jesus was born to a homeless vagabond family who were not well enough connected to find even a cheap hotel room.

Then there was the arrival of the Three Kings or Magi. Imagine the hardships of these three coming all the way from Persia by camel or afoot! TS Eliot captures the travail of their journey in his poem "Journey of the Magi":

*A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.*

Did they think their painful journey worth it? True, their eyes followed the star until they finally beheld the Christ child; but they also left a wake of death behind as King Herod followed them until they gave him the slip, and then the cruel King ordered all baby boys in Bethlehem slain to save his throne. Eliot continues:

*Were we led all that way for birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly  
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death but had thought they were different;  
this Birth was Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death. We returned to our places,  
these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.*

Christmas brings light that overcomes darkness, life that crushes death and hope that fills our hearts. I am guessing Hannukah, Kwanzaa and many other good holidays do the same, but since I am a Christian I am unqualified to say much about those. I only know that Christmas lights a candle on the altar of my heart just when I need it most.

This has been Dan Price for community comment