

The Christmas Story Is Always Happening



The Christmas story as found in Luke and Matthew's gospel never happened, yet it is still happening. This is the mystery and power of myth. Neither Mark or John bother with a birth narrative. Mind you, John sets Jesus' life within the context of a

creation story. "In the beginning was the Word..." It shouldn't really be a faith-buster to realize that Luke and Matthew's birth stories differ on a great many details. Nor should we be anxiously trying to harmonize them—although this makes for great entertainment in most Christmas pageants.

What's still happening? Right from the start we are reminded that nothing is possible without the words that have been immortalized in Mary's response to the angel's announcement. "Let it be to me according to your word". This holy "yes" is the way that new futures still come into being. We don't discover the deep purpose of our lives until we allow our soul to break through the fear that is our egoic personality structure, with those same words. And then, we become with Mary, responsible for the future that needs us in order to emerge. It all begins with consent to the good news that the best is yet to come, and it's coming through us and all willing souls.

What's still happening? Well, women like Mary are still doing an end-run around patriarchy, giving birth to a new humanity. In the words of Canadian singer-songwriter, "Mary has a child without the help of a man". I think here of Malala Yousafzai, the youngest woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for standing up to the Taliban around the rights of education for Pakistani

girls. She was shot in the head by these evil men, but survived, and hers was the first voice I heard speaking out against the Taliban's slaughter of 142 innocent school children this past week. The man who did help Mary, Joseph, also defied patriarchal and sexist norms in conspiring to give birth to the Christ child.

ISIS, along with the Syrian regime, would make it to the top of my list for those contemporary men who embody Herod energy in the story, the archetype of twisted masculine energy, willing to execute children at the altar of Empire, (or in this case, religious ideology). That energy lives today, and only the most naive and innocent of spiritual expressions deny the existence of evil. Of course, Herod also lives within each one of us, threatened by the emergence of new life (Christ archetype). There is part of us that would rather destroy the nascent life within than die to the personality structure and give birth to the new.

What else is still happening that this Christmas myth captures? Well, I love the part about the Magi, the Zoroastrian star-gazers who spend their lives in contemplation. This occupation, this preoccupation, is so subversive today, in a global society that cannot see much further than economic policy. We have no time to gaze at stars while there is money to be made and endless amounts of work to be done.



Our myopia is thrown into stark relief by the Magi, who intuit that the movement of the stars hold the secret to our future. They are not cynics. They are not materialists. They feel that the cosmos itself is impregnated with meaning and purpose, that it's going somewhere, that it's *for us* somehow. How much richer this is than the Herodian orthodoxy of materialism bent on reducing the world to physical processes, and in the

process voiding the universe of deep, intrinsic purpose.

While we're on the Magi, there's is a spiritual orientation worth replicating. First, note that they come to pay homage to the Christ child, laden with gifts. Unlike, fundamentalist Christians, who make the journey to foreign lands intent only on converting the natives to their version of religion, the Magi come purely in a spirit of devotion. They recognize that something of cosmic import is about to happen in this birth. They leave their gifts, and critically outfox Herod. They are wise men, after all, who know the ways of the world, know how the dominant order works, and have lost all interest in whatever that order has to offer them by way of bribes and favours. The story says that they "returned home *another way*". Metaphorically speaking, despite having their own belief systems and spiritual practice, (which didn't change – there was no "conversion") they were open enough to be changed through their devotion.



And while we're on the topic of the Bethlehem birth, I also love that it is cosmological in scope. The star points the way, and the star stands still over

the stable. To my mind this describes what cosmologist, Brian Swimme, calls the power of centration. The Whole con-centrates itself in this birth. A single star, representing the trillions of galaxies, is present reminding us what the writers of the myth could not have known, that we were given life by those stars, and that what is happening in the stable is the concentration of all the heavy elements that were born in a star's death. The cosmos participates in this legend of the birth of a Messiah. This is, we now know, not merely romantic. The evolutionary worldview reminds us that it takes a whole cosmos to produce a Jesus of Nazareth, and by immortalizing this story in sacred myth, we can contemplate this mystery annually.

What's still happening which the Christmas story captures? The Christ is still being born through willing souls, willing to subvert the dominant order, the insanity of inhumane living—what life looks like alienated from natural intelligence and allegiance to the deepest evolutionary currents of a Spirit-soaked universe.