

Reflection – December 2011

The emerging winter season invites us to embrace an increasing experience of darkness. It can be disheartening, even frightening. Darkness is not our natural home as humans. Our impulse, generally, is to move out of darkness, into light.

And yet, darkness can offer a positive balance to our day, a time of nurturance or rest, of quiet pondering. Darkness is the context for the birthing of new light and energy. So it has been since the original fire ball exploded out of darkness; so it continues over centuries of birthing. Mystics have come to love the darkness; to know it as the womb of Divine generativity.



Yet how easily we can be distracted, allowing ourselves to become immersed in practices of avoiding the darkness, filling our homes and hearts with bright lights, glitter and increased busyness so as to “get through” the dark months for another year. What is it that propels us so? What might happen if we chose instead to welcome the darkness and breathe into it, opening ourselves to its wisdom and power?

The winter solstice – honoring the height of this season of darkness – is celebrated shortly before Christmas, coming this year on Dec. 21. Many religions and many native cultures choose this time for festivals of light: for the Christian world, the celebration of Christ as the light of the world. Ancient civilizations did not need encouragement to notice the darkness; in fact, it was inescapable. But in our own time, when escape is possible and even tempting, let us stay faithful to practices of embracing the darkness: let it deepen our reflection, and temper our observance of the Christmas holidays.

Give us, this year, an adult Christmas
Since among adults first you came;
Not in a crèche or kindergarten
You showed your face and learned your name.
Then help our adult lives attest
That child-like trust you reckoned best.

Give us, this year, a worldly Christmas
Since it was to this world you came,
Sent to redeem all earthly matter
While strictured by a human frame.
Then for creation let us share
Your kindly gaze, your constant care.

Give us, this year, a peaceful Christmas
Since as the Prince of peace you came.
Still jealous Herods call for slaughter,
Still Caesars play their power game.
When will all earth's politics portray
Peace is no prize: peace is the way?

And give us time for you this Christmas
Since into time for us you came,
Bringing the voice that forged creation
Where it might gently say our name.
Then let our hearts rejoice and sing.
"Glory to God for everything."

Text of the hymn *Give Us This Year* by John L. Bell, copyright 2001
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