

Donald G. Brown
St. Mary the Virgin
Christmas Day
12/25/16

While John tells the story of the coming of Jesus into our world much differently than do Matthew and Luke (Mark doesn't even mention Jesus' birth), all four gospel writers in their own way make the point that Jesus brought a new and healing light into our world.

There are those who dismiss the story of the birth of Jesus as "myth" by which they mean "it is totally preposterous." And since we are separated from the events of Jesus' birth by 2000 years, at least from my perspective, it is pointless to argue about the specific facts that surrounded the birth of Jesus.

John, in the prologue to his Gospel which we just heard is interested in the "so what difference did this guy "Jesus" make in the world?"

Certainly in this season of the year the affects of Jesus' birth and life impact the actions of believers and skeptics alike. The media carry heart-warming stories about how Scrooges become transformed into generous and loving people, helping the poor and others who are often ignored the rest of the year. It seems the "Christmas Spirit" is catching.

I heard recently about a man who worked for the Post Office whose job was to process all the mail that had illegible addresses.

One bleak December day, a letter came addressed, in a shaky handwriting, to God with no actual address. The postal worker thought he should open the letter to see what it was about.

The letter read:

Dear God,

I am an 83-year-old widow, living on a very small pension.

Yesterday someone stole my purse. It had \$100 in it, which was all the money I had left until my next pension payment.

Saturday is Christmas, and I had invited two of my friends over for dinner. Without that money, I have nothing to buy food with and I have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope...Can you please help me?

Sincerely, Edna

The postal worker was very touched. He showed the letter to all the other workers. Each one dug into his or her wallet and came up with a few dollars.

By the time he made the rounds, amazingly they had collected \$96, which they put into an envelope and sent to the woman who had included her return address on her letter to God.

The rest of the day, all the workers felt a warm glow thinking of Edna and the dinner she would be able to share with her friends. Christmas came and went.

A few days after Christmas, another letter arrived from the same old lady addressed to God.

All the workers gathered around while the letter was opened.

It read:

Dear God,

How can I ever thank you enough for what you did for me? Because of your gift of love, I was able to fix a glorious dinner for my friends. We had a very nice day and I told my friends of your wonderful gift.

Sincerely, Edna

P.S. By the way, there was \$4 missing. I think it must have been taken by those greedy creeps at the post office.

For folks like Edna, the darkness of life's experiences almost swallows up the light of Christ's love at work in their lives. And yet the Christ Light John spoke of shines on, never quenched, never totally overcome by the very real darkness that is all too prevalent in our world.

Often we sentimentalize the Christmas story, the cute animals at the manger, the beatific smile of the blessed Virgin, the night sky full of the bright light of the Star of Bethlehem and of course the Angels trumpeting the good news of the birth.

Yet the awful truth, known at least as a foreboding to Mary and Joseph, was that trouble lay ahead for this blessed baby. Looming over the manger and the baby in it from the very beginning was the shadow of the cross.

The birth of Jesus was God's embrace of all of life, including death itself. This is a birth that does not deny the darkness and difficulties of life but instead heralds the coming of a Holy Light that is transformative.

The God whom we worship does not ignore the tragedies and heart breaks of our world; rather God's Light of Love transforms and transfigures even the darkest of the dark places in our lives.

In the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God embraces all that we are, including our anguish, our illnesses, our bitter disappointments and failures, all that is negative, all that makes us less than we are created to be. God sweeps it all into his infinite heart and shines his love into our darkness and never gives up on us. Never. Not even when, like Edna, we feel life and God has shortchanged us!

On this Christmas Day, and every day, God comes to us in great humility and lovingly offers his presence and the light of his love. Our task is to receive that love with gratitude and with that same humility with which God loves us.

The birth of Jesus within us changes us. Beyond the commercialism of the Christmas season lays a Holy Spirit, a Spirit that inspires people to be generous and kind in ways that elude them much of the rest of the year. In such actions God's love is incarnated, enfleshed and lovingly shared with others so that they too might experience the Light of God's eternal Love that shines with brightness and perseverance that can penetrate and illuminate even the darkest places in life.

This is the "so what" of the birth of Jesus. "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only child, full of grace and truth."

So good Christian friends, rejoice, Christ is born and we, and our world are changed, miraculously changed. Merry Christmas.

AMEN