

## God so loved the world...



*Nativity, Justin O'Brien (c 1949)*

The medieval Franciscan philosopher and theologian, Duns Scotus, wrote that God intended to come among us long before any sin of Adam. So much did God love us. So much did God want to draw us into life in the Trinity.

Our Judaeo-Christian claim of God who is called Emmanuel (“the God who dwells among us”) is a bold one. Bold on God’s part, too. Many faith traditions have deities coming to earth, appearing in human form. But in disguise. Not fully enfleshed. Here we are, though, entering the season which celebrates God becoming “like us in all things but sin” (as the scripture goes).

We can treat ourselves to many things at Christmas. The media constantly encourages us to do just that. Badgers us, rather. But let us not forget to treat ourselves with a little space. A space to really let it sink home what happened on that Christmas day. A turning-point in history, of cosmic proportions. God chose to pitch his tent among us, as John’s Gospel so earthly puts it. To take on human flesh. To live like us. To feel every emotion that we feel. To share our lives and walk in our shoes. To work, to love, to struggle, to laugh, to weep, to be angered, to pray, to hunger, to suffer and to know loss. To be on the road, to be exiled, to be persecuted, to be one with so many victims of injustice. To show us a way. God’s eternity became one with our destiny. That is worth sitting with, worth thinking about, worth being thankful for, this

season.

Perhaps the greatest theologian of last century was the German Jesuit, Karl Rahner SJ. I have to admit that in theology I found some of his writings so profound as to be almost ungraspable. But he once wrote this about Christmas. And I get it:

Now we no longer need to seek him in the endlessness of heaven, where our spirit and our heart get lost. Now he himself is on our very earth, where he is no better off than we and where he receives no special privileges, but our very fate: hunger, weariness, enmity, mortal terror and a wretched death. That the infinity of God should take upon itself human narrowness, that bliss should accept the mortal sorrow of the earth, that life should take on death – this is the most unlikely truth. But only this – the obscure light of faith – makes our nights bright, only this makes them holy.

In a more lyrical way, contemporary Anglo-Canadian poet, Luci Shaw, describes the coming of this Child on that holy night in a way perhaps only a mother could. It is entitled *A Blessing for the New Baby*.

Lightly as a falling star, immense, may you  
drop into the body of the pure young girl like a seed  
into its furrow, entering your narrow home under the shadow  
of Gabriel's feathers. May your flesh shape itself within her,  
swelling her with shame and glory. May her belly grow  
round as a small planet, a bowl of golden fruit.

When you suck in your first breath, and your loud cries  
echo through the cave (Blessings on you, little howler!),  
may Mary adorn you with tears and caresses like ribbons,  
her face glowing, a moon among stars. At her breasts  
may you drink the milk of mortality that transforms you,  
even more, into one of your own creatures.

And now, as the night of this world folds you in  
its brutal frost (the barnyard smell strong as sin),  
and as Joseph, weary with unwelcome and relief, his hands  
bloody from your birth, spreads his thin cloak  
around you both, we doubly bless you, Baby,  
as you are acquainted, for the first time, with our grief.

So let's treat ourselves with a little space these days. Let's pause to remind ourselves of what God has done out of love for us. How close God comes.