

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

“Hallelujah! Christ is Born!”

In a Woody Allen movie *The Purple Rose of Cairo* a young woman goes to the movies every day to escape life. In a way the movies become her life, the characters her friends. One day a character broke from his script, looked directly at the woman and said, “You must really love this picture. You’ve been here all day, and I’ve seen you twice before!” Then he stepped off screen and into her world. Separation between screen and audience shattered; a new relationship began. There was a defining moment when before turned to after, when the relationship changed forever.¹

When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the relational gap or distance between God and all humanity ended. A relationship with God, formerly not possible for non-Jews, was made possible in the person of Jesus the Christ. U.A. Fanthorpe’s poem *BC:AD* speaks of...this moment when nothing happened, and yet everything happened as a few folks walked “by starlight straight into the kingdom of heaven” in a stable!

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After.

“In his human incarnation Jesus embodied a divine affirmation...that God embraces all the world and everyone in it, and that (God) meets (us) in exceptional ways in all the unexceptional times and places of (our) ordinary (lives)... Because of the incarnation, any and every dimension of life becomes an arena of God's extraordinary saving activity.”² This is wonderful news! Yet its expression gets lost in the bustle of the season.

I read a story in the newspaper this week about a children’s holiday concert at a local school. The reporter talked about how the children sang “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer to celebrate Christmas” and then went on to sing about Hanukah and Kwanza! I hope that the Hanukah and Kwanza songs were really about the religious holiday they celebrate. If singing about Rudolph is all Christmas is claimed to be, then we Christians are in trouble. The message of Christ is not found in the lyrics. As fun Rudolph is to sing, and it’s a catchy little tune which I like to sing while caroling, its message of the “reindeer that could” cannot compare with proclaiming the power of the Word made flesh dwelling among us! The zeal of the Lord of Hosts brought about Jesus’ birth for our sake—there is no grander, larger, more wonderful gift to be given or received than the Christ for which we celebrate Christmas.

There was a moment when before turned to after, when good news of great joy was proclaimed for all the people!

The Christmas story tells us that God has chosen to be with humanity through thick and thin. God has chosen to be our Savior for all time despite the messes we’ve made and will continue to make in the future. “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” There is no better tiding of comfort and joy than God’s promise to be for and with all the cosmos through Jesus Christ and the Spirit who is with us always.

The word Hallelujah, printed on your bulletin cover, means “Praise ye the Lord!” May we like the shepherds in the story of Jesus birth go out into the world glorifying and praising God for the new relationship God brought about for us and for our salvation. Hallelujah! Christ is born! Amen.

¹ Idea from “When God Steps Off the Screen” from *Life After Grace: Daily Reflections on the Bible* by Carol M. Bechtel (Louisville: WJKP, 2003) p 52-4.

² Dan Clendenin, “When the Time Came,” [The Journey With Jesus, Notes to Myself](http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20051219JJ.shtml).
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