

“Something Different”

December 24, 2017

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Earlier, we heard the words of the Iona Community, asking if the Eternal will do something different this Christmas. We come to understand through the reading that we, also, are invited to do something different.

Some of the members of this congregation will find resonance in this theology of an entity that is both fully human and fully Divine. Others are not theist, or are theist but not Christian, or are polytheist, or are not sure. Some of us find in Jesus a savior, some a teacher, some an ethicist, some an organizer, and some a reminder that each child is born with a spark of the holy. We have many ways of seeking and experiencing the sacred in this community.

Yet we are here, on Christmas Eve, because this giant story about a small family and the people who show up for them stirs something within us. We are here because the songs and rituals of this season have meaning, whether or not the meaning we make of them is similar to that of our neighbors or our extended family. There is something in the Nativity story and its retelling that touches our hearts and invites us to do something different.

Part of the reason this story continues to ignite the imagination is because certain things do not seem to be different. Over and over again, governments make decrees that require the people who have the least to take on an undue burden of travel, to wait in lines, to put their health and comfort aside in order to meet the demands of the bureaucracy they need to navigate in order to survive. Ask anyone who doesn't have the money to pay for the state ID they need to access benefits. Ceaser is still calling for the world to be enrolled. Over and over again, we hear there is no room at the inn, that it is more important to prop up a system of wealth disparity than to ensure that all of our neighbors have the dignity of secure, safe shelter. Mary and Joseph are still seeking a place where she may be delivered. Over and over again, tyrants put the lives of children at risk, or even threaten them directly, in order to consolidate their power. We hear that refugees are dangerous, and so families must find some other way to flee or perish. Herod is still cutting short the lives of the innocents.

The Nativity story continues to be relevant because some of the evils of the world come back around again and again. At the same time, we are offered some paths of resistance and response. When there seems to be no room, we make room in surprising places. When we feel disconnected from our neighbors, as if the joys and sorrows of others have nothing to do with us, we are told, “Unto YOU a child is born,

unto YOU a son is given.” People who think themselves wise may be fooled into colluding with the empire for a moment, but they can always choose to realign their gifts and to return home by another road. Evil has the same old tricks, but the Nativity story whispers that we can do something different.

The Nativity story is an epic narrative. It is also a personal story, one where a child is born, and loving hands wrap him in swaddling clothes, and his mother ponders things in her heart. Here, too, we can do something different. We manifest the essence of the Divine and the human among us when we gather in sacred community. Here, we learn to be vulnerable. Here, we learn to care for the people among us, and to allow ourselves to be cared for. In churches and synagogues and mosques and meditation groups and sacred groves and circles of dance, we learn to connect with the source of blessing as we understand it to be, and to draw from that strength in healing our communities and our world.

This Christmas, allow the sacred dark to nurture a seed of hope. Allow the reflective silence to give your heart the space to open. Allow the great stories to draw you into communities where healing in personal ways and societal ways can be learned. May the Eternal continue to surprise us, and may we find in the rituals and songs of this season the inspiration to do something different.

So be it. Blessed be. Amen.