

Merry Christmas For All Creation
Rev. Doug Floyd

The Surprise Party

*Christmas appears like a midnight surprise
Angels ignite shadowy skies.
A voice heard in the winter cold,
"God is young but man is old."*

*Joseph and Mary put to the test
Tired and aching but nowhere to rest.
The cold winter wearies like a constant thresh.
A virgin gives birth to God's Word made flesh*

*The great reverse revealed this night.
Blind eyes behold a glorious sight.
Shepherds astir by a thought so odd.
They're led before the lamb of God.*

*Wise kings seek for the infant Lord
Whose wisdom is stronger than the wielded sword.
The earth is reborn in the birth of a Son.
His kingdom will come His will will be done.*

*Man fell from Eden's holy ground
We could not go up so God came down.
He revealed a love too good to be true
By the power of His life, all becomes new.*

*alan douglas floyd
12/23/2002*

Year after year, I continue standing in astonishment before the strange delight of the Christmas story. The days grow shorter. The nights grow longer. The bleak midwinter chills the heart. The world slumps back into darkness. When darkness should be the strongest and dreariest, the Light of Life breaks into our world.

GK Chesterton once said, "Any one thinking of the Holy Child as born in December would mean by it exactly what we mean by it; that Christ is not merely a summer sun of the prosperous but a winter fire for the unfortunate" (The New Jerusalem, chap 5). He acknowledged the symbolic power of celebrating the birth of Jesus during the coldest, darkest season.

The cold days and long nights only serve to magnify the clash of impossibilities bursting out from this ancient tale. Shepherds hear angels sing. Wise men follow a star. A virgin gives birth. Light overcomes darkness. Good conquers evil.

The broken fragments of a world gone wrong are bound in the babe in the manger. Jesus, God with us, arrives under the song, "Peace on earth. Goodwill to man."

As we hear the story, sing the songs and give the gifts, we may wonder if this story is simply too good to be true. Did God really bring peace and goodwill? If we're really honest, we begin by questioning our own life in our own little world. Darkness and defeat often seem to thrive.

Hatred flourishes. People ache. Children suffer. We struggle to understand why. Dostevsky speaks to the heart of our questions in Ivan Karamazov's response to his brother Alyosha as he considers faith in God in light of children suffering.

"It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket."

Some of us may also have been tempted to "return the ticket" in the face of our own suffering or the suffering all around us. Evil invades everything, corrupting the world and blocking the light of God's love.

Searching the dense fog of darkness enveloping our news, our culture and often our lives, we seek answers to the problem of evil. TF Torrance once suggested that our search for answers even in Scripture may find limited results. The evil of evil is so pervasive that it infects everything--even our thoughts.

Scripture never offers a comprehensive theory of evil or an exhaustive defense of God in the face of evil. Rather, it acknowledges the presence of evil. In the paradise of Eden, evil appears. It even shows up at the Nativity.

Right after the miraculous birth of Jesus, we encounter the troubling story of Herod's slaughter of innocent babes. Evil appears at the very beginning of Jesus' life. We could almost tell the whole story of Incarnation through the lens of evil. From his birth to his death, Jesus is attacked, threatened, sought and eventually killed by evil humans.

Now pause and think about that for one moment. Throughout the whole story of Emmanuel, God with us, evil is present. God comes to us in the person of Jesus. He suffers from evil attacks and eventually is killed by evil.

While the Bible doesn't completely explain the presence of evil, it does reveal a God who enters into the struggle against evil in this world. He never, never, never abandons us in evil. From the suffering children to the despairing saints, He is present.

He is present in our brokenness. He is present in our suffering. He is present in our dying. He is present in our death.

In the wondrous Nativity story, we behold the baby Jesus. We behold the Lord who has entered into the evil and pain and struggle of a world bent back upon itself. Even in the joy and promise of peace, we see the threat of a darkness coming to destroy Him.

And yet, the light shines out brightly. The angels rejoice. The shepherds kneel. The wise worship. We behold the glory of light overcoming darkness. From birth through life to death, every moment of Jesus' life is act of redemption. He is redeeming all human existence. He is redeeming all creation.

He enters into our fragmentation and takes that division into His love, redeeming and reconciling the world to the Father. He dies under the power of evil and rises again defeat the power of evil, defeating death and taking our humanity into the glory of the Godhead.

So even as he enters our struggles and suffering and evil, by His grace we enter His righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. In Him and through Him we incarnate the light of glory in all this world.

It has not fully been revealed what we will be or what this earth will be, but we know death and evil and all darkness will be completely eliminated and love and hope and faith will prevail.

So we rejoice in this wondrous birth that reconciles the opposites and reveals the Father. We rest in His faithfulness in the midst of our messy world, our messy lives. We bring our opposites to the stable, to the cross, to the throne.

There we discover a Savior who is at the right hand of the Father praying for us! In Him and by His Spirit, we can rejoice even in the midst of suffering, we can know love even in the midst of struggle, we shine out as lights in the midst of dark universe.

So let us rejoice in the birth of the baby while we worship the Lord who will bring all things into submission--even death.