

Filled with Wonder

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Luke 18:15-17

Our Christmas Tree has been up since Thanksgiving. It seems that each year we put it up earlier than the year before. It may be because we are a bit more nostalgic for Christmas' past when we had a little girl in the house.

When Lisa was with us, the tree symbolized the fact that Christmas cannot be far away. It wasn't just the enthusiasm of being able to help Mom and Dad with such an important task as that of decorating the tree, it was the *wonder* that shone in her eyes and overflowed her whole being...a *wonder* that knows not the bounds of cause and effect, or the laws of nature. It was a *wonder* that was not burdened by questions and doubts and fears. When the Christmas tree went up, everything was pervaded by *magic, miracle and wonder*.

It is not quite the same now, and I miss how it used to be. Lisa has grown into a lovely, smart young woman, and for this I am very grateful. But I miss the little girl whose eyes would light up with wonder at Christmas time. I miss that, because she always reminded me of something important within me...something that is not as prevalent in my life as it should be...*A Sense Of Wonder*.

Sam Keen has written, "Wonder is that spiritual stance or disposition which renders us humble in the face of things, and also fills us with gratitude. To try and live humbly and with a sense of gratitude--*in wonder*--is what it means to follow a sacred path." And it was Aristotle who said that "philosophy begins with wonder." One of the most important ways in which we relate to the world as something sacred is by renewing our *sense of wonder*.

Christmas is the season of wonder, because that is what the season is all about--the invisible, a time that cannot be measured by our traditional tools of reason and analysis...a time filled with humility and gratitude. It is about the Christian belief that God became human and dwelt among us. How do we perceive that with our eyes? How do we wrap our minds around that event? I can't explain it, nor can I prove it. It defies analysis and reason.

A few years ago I conducted a mini-seminar on the "Birth Narratives" that are found in Matthew and Luke. Mark and John do not have birth narratives--Mark's Gospel begins with the baptism of Jesus, and John's Gospel begins at the beginning of time..."In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." I spoke about the differences between the two accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke, focusing on The Annunciation, The Virgin Birth, The Wise Men and The Manger. The discrepancies between the two accounts are numerous, and as I spoke I noticed a glazed look

beginning to form in the eyes of those listening. I suppose it is important to know about the various differences between Matthew and Luke, but the Christmas Season is not the time for a critical, scholarly analysis of the birth passages! I might give such a seminar here someday, but it will be in the middle of August!

Instead, the focus of the season should be on *wonder*. It is not a time for reason and analysis or explanations. Wonder is what the wise men had, and what the shepherds had, and at the manger their wonder gave way to worship. And wonder is what children have. To children, Christmas is one big wondrous miracle--not to be understood, or explained or proved, but to be *enjoyed* and at which to *marvel*.

I am sure that it was this attitude of wonder that led Jesus in later years to say, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it." These words from Jesus should cause all of us hard-headed adults to pause. And on this Christmas Eve it is a good time for all of us to pause...

And so, our Christmas tree sits in the corner of our living room, filled with lights and ornaments, and many memories. Some evenings when I have time to sit and admire the tree, I can imagine a little girl dancing around it, her

eyes filled with wonder. It is a wonder that inspires me, and fills me with humility and gratitude for the Christmas season. "Now they were bringing infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for such belongs the Kingdom of God.'"

I hope this season is a time of wonder for all of you, and that such wonder will issue in experiences of transformation. May the joy of today and tomorrow help us to become like little children...*excited, open, vulnerable, and filled with a sense of wonder.*