

CHRISTMAS - 2005
“Invitation to the Dance”

Unlike all other stories, the Christmas story does not begin with “*Once upon a time.*” It is a story that began even before there were any stars in the heavens, let alone the one that settled over the little town of Bethlehem two millennia ago. The Christmas story began at a time when time didn’t even exist, not yet. Nothing existed, nowhere, anywhere, except Love. For all eternity, Love existed, because we have learned that God is love. That’s why love will never end. It never had a beginning. Love always was, always is and always will be. It is the foundation of everything, because God is Love. Did you catch it? God is not a being that loves. God **is** love. Love is the very nature of God’s being, the life-flow between Father, Son and Spirit. The Greeks of the early church used another word for this life-flow in God, “*perichoresis.*” It means dance. They saw the inner life of God as like a dynamic, loving dance. God was not the dancer, but the Dance itself.

We’ve heard stories about Christmas from almost every angle; from the point of view of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men. And then there are stories about Christmas as seen through the eyes of a drummer boy, a mouse in the manger and, this year’s story for our little ones, through the eyes of the camel that carried the gifts to Jesus. Well, wouldn’t it be interesting to know what Christmas meant through the eyes of God? What might that be like?

God created us as human beings with a capacity that no other creature had in quite the same way. We were created in God’s image. That is, we were created to share in the very life of God. We were created to love, to know love, to live in love and to enter into the very love of God. That is our

purpose for being. God created us so we could enter into the Divine Dance and so that the Divine Dance could enter into us. That is why God created us, for union with God and one another. It was like paradise.

The first humans had it within their grasp to pass this gift on to those who came after them. But they said, *“No. We’ll do it our own way if you don’t mind.”* And thus they broke their extraordinary relationship of love with God and with one another and chaos ensued. Eventually, people no longer had any idea of who they were, why they were, what they were on this earth for. And because they didn’t know the purpose of life, they didn’t know how to treat one another. What happened to someone else didn’t matter as long as #1 got ahead. Life was cheap. The weak and poor were dispensable. They had no notion of a God of love or that they were the object of that love, or were created to enter into the Divine Dance of Love.

God was heartsick at their rejection of and resistance to his love. But God never stopped loving. He couldn’t. He was Love after all. So God began to form a people who would listen to him once again. It took centuries. But God never gave up, never stopped loving. And then, one night, as the story is told, a bright star shattered the night’s darkness to signal that the time had come at last. And oh, how God had longed for this night! God was far more excited about its coming than any child awaiting jolly old St. Nicholas. God had created us so we could enter into his very life and share in the Divine Dance of the Trinity. And to make sure we wouldn’t mess it up this time, to show us how we were supposed to live with God and one another; that divine Love was enfleshed in the infant Jesus born into our midst that special night. God-with-us was our second chance.

Through the incarnation, the door to a new life opened. It’s like God reached out through that baby and extended an invitation to us to become a

part of the Divine Dance again, part of the life-flow of love meant for us and all people for all eternity. If Jesus could speak from the manger, I imagine him saying:

“Oh, how I have longed to be with you like this. So close. We no longer have to be separate. You are not outsiders! As you hold me, know I am holding you. My love embraces you. Do you sense your dignity again? How precious you are? I look like you, but at a deeper level, you look like me. While I am made in your image now, you were made in my image first, remember? Watch me when I grow up and you will see what true love looks like. But there’s time in the future for that. For now, come closer. Look. It’s me, with you! Don’t be afraid. Come closer. Don’t be afraid. Yes, I mean you. Come out of the shadows. I have come for you, yes, and for you and you and you.”

No wonder the first to see the baby Jesus were shepherds, representing the poor and disenfranchised of the world. No wonder kings from the east came on bended knee. Before the infant Jesus, they sensed an inner capacity for greatness that far outstripped whatever dignity they had as kings. The infant reminds us that we are not meant to be alone. Life is meant to be lived in the plural. It’s about relationships, and how we live together as human beings. Why? Because the flow of God’s love is present where two or more gather in his name. God is in the relationships that hold us together and give us life. And when we tap into the reality of that Divine Dance of Love with, in, through and around us, we will at last get it. It will become our way of life.

We are never far from that Divine Dance. Let a crack appear in our defenses, and things change. On Christmas Eve in 1914 during World War I, a truce was declared and a sudden silence fell over the western front. It was an eerie silence. Then, cautiously, soldiers from each side emerged

from their trenches. They moved toward one another, and suddenly, the silence was broken. Not by the report of a rifle, but with the sound of someone singing a Christmas Carol. Before long, men from both sides joined in. As the truce lasted, some talked, others started to play ball together. On the surface they were enemies, but at a deeper level, they were brothers, and they sensed it. For a few hours, the forces of heaven overwhelmed the forces of hell, thanks to their common bond to the infant in the crib.

When the angels sang that holy night, I can imagine God as their conductor, and urging them, “*Fortissimo, Fortissimo!*” “*Louder and louder!*” God had waited a long time for this moment. And in the Eucharist, Jesus continues to beckon us as he did from the manger. “*Come closer. Come out of the shadows. Don’t be afraid of my love. Come closer. Closer!*”