

Starry Night

So I have been asking myself why I am having such difficulty getting into the Christmas spirit this year? I know that we are new to celebrating this holiday Florida style, so I anticipated it feeling different; however, I have been really trying to capture what are important differences and what are merely associations that I need to let go.

My first inclination was to think that this didn't feel like Christmas because we didn't have any snow. After spending over 40 years in a winter wonderland, my connection between Christmas and snow is deeply rooted. How odd to listen to Christmas carols about "the weather outside [being] frightful" while being warmed by the sunshine and wearing sandals. Shouldn't my feet be wrapped in boots while my hands are tucked away in a holiday muff?

Yet when I think of the shepherds' feet that greeted this newborn babe, they, too, were donning sandals. Jesus didn't have snow in Bethlehem. He was merely wrapped in a blanket, not sheep's fur and a snow hat. So I have been slowly letting go of my expectation that Christmas needs to be painted on a canvas of white.

If our lack of snow isn't the main culprit in making the Christmas spirit so elusive this year, then what is it? As I often found myself skipping certain holiday songs, such as "Frosty the Snowman," "White Christmas," and "Let it Snow," I did find myself gravitating toward other carols: "O, Holy Night," and "Do you Hear what I Hear?" I realized that some songs emphasized the external world of Christmastime while others highlighted our internal world. I no longer believed that the world outside needed to have snowmen and icicles in order for Christmas to

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come. But now I needed to better understand what my inner world needed to look like in order for Christ to come. Ah, I could there was a hint buried in the different focus between these two words: Christmas and Christ.

When I thought about which words in these songs resonated with me, I kept coming back to the images of the stars. “The stars are brightly shining” and “A star, a star, dancing in the night.” Why might it be more about the stars than the snow? And weren’t the stars just another element of the external world?

Yet I came back to one basic truth: in order for stars to be fully realized, it needs to be dark. Living in a world of sunshine, we don’t have the overcast sky that made me love those Christmas lights so much. In the Chicagoland world of winter dreariness, I treasured driving around and relishing the Christmas lights. I needed them. I would even go so far as to say that my soul ached for them. In that atmosphere of darkness, I craved light.

Perhaps that is my main discovery this holiday season. We need to recognize the darkness of our world, our human nature, in order to have a spirit that craves God’s light. We need to hunger for a Star to light our way. We need to admit that our souls yearn for something more, so that we start looking heavenward. So this holiday season I am more about the inner world than the outer world, more about Christ than Christmas, and more about the stars than the snow.

Florida won’t gift me with the holiday season of my youth, but it has led me to not only appreciate the extravagant warmth of the sun, but also the quiet and necessary beauty of the stars. I want this Christmas to be about treasuring how stars pierce through

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our dark sky just as Jesus pierced through our dark world. I want to see stars "dancing in the night" ...because with God's love our souls can't help but dance the darkness away.