

**“The Uncontrollable Mystery on the Bestial Floor”
Meditation and Prayer for Advent 1
from the Hanging of the Greens Service**

Psalm 4:6

O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us,
O LORD!

Isaiah 42:6-7

I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to
open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the
dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

John 1:4-5, 9

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of
all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not
overcome it. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming
into the world.

Rev 22:12, 13, 16

See, I am coming soon... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the
last, the beginning and the end. It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you
with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of
David, the bright morning star.

I John 5:11, 20

And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in
God’s Son...He is the true God and eternal life.

The Meditation

Ten years ago, in a book called What Matters Most, the writer and
Jungian psychotherapist James Hollis wrote:

“What is going on here? How is the Prince of Peace, the humble servant in the stable, being celebrated?”

“How are his values being emulated, this man who said that his kingdom was not of this world?”

“What are we to make of these frenzied [Christmastime] rituals?”

“At least millennia ago, when...our ancestors lit candles or created bonfires to entice the sun to return, something vital was at stake. They desperately hoped to nurse, cajole, seduce the sun to swing back from its great arc southward, lest they perish from the bitter cold and the crops fail to return for lack of the sun’s seminal rays.

“Well,” James Hollis writes, “perhaps something vital is at stake here...still, even in all this shopping madness.

“Wheresoever such energy is invested, something vital must be at stake, but it may have little to do with Jesus, or what Yeats once called ‘the Galilean turbulence on the bestial floor.’”ⁱ

Hollis actually has that quote a little bit mixed up; it’s from a poem by Yeats called “The Magi,” which pictures the same people who had brought gifts to the boy Jesus, years later standing at his cross

“With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more...
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.”ⁱⁱ

God is inviting you further, deeper, into right relationship with an uncontrollable mystery that took place on a dirt floor in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Advent is the Church’s way of accepting that invitation on your behalf and on behalf of us all.

Something vital is always at stake, and what is at stake for us, and for all creation, has everything to do with Jesus, and everything to do with what happened that night in Bethlehem, and everything to do with all humanity—every single human being—and everything to do with you and your relationships to all of that.

To that end, I invite you to bow with me.

Prayer

Eternal and Immediate God,

You descend into our seasonal festivities,
 our acts of decency toward the poor and one another,
 and our expressions and enactments of family at Christmastime;

and you invite and elevate our spirits into the divine,
 in the season we mark as Advent
 and in our living in the real time of the coming of our savior.

God of our Christmas memories,
 Thank you for the sentiment that connects us to the eternal.
 Thank you for Christmas songs and warm light on cold dark evenings.
 Thank you for sacred images of a world now past or that never was—
 a mythologized world where Christmastime was always right.

Help us, in this real Advent time,
 to reckon with remembrances of pain, disappointment and regret;
 to be comforted by your compassion
 as we remember with an insatiable longing
 all that we once had
 which is now confined to the world
 of recollection and reflection.

God of the Christmastime we inhabit and experience,

Help us, in this real Advent time,
to deal with the broken and the discouraging;
the baffling, the heartbreaking and the infuriating;
the aching and the apathy.

O God, in your Word throughout human history
you have specifically charged people of power and means
with caring for the powerless and poor;

you raise your powerful arm to put down the mighty from their thrones,
not for when they have merely inconvenienced
those of us who are doing all right,
but in judgement against those
who exploit and fail to care for the poor.

Thwart, we pray, the machinations
which act against your will for all humankind,
and magnify the efforts of those who work
for what in your eyes are justice and righteousness.

God of our Christmas hopes,
our bodies weaken, our minds diminish,
our spirits tremble and our emotions fall to chaos.

Help us in this real Advent time
to cling to the truth and beauty in which you come to us.

You are the God who reaches across the universe to be with us,
You are the Christ who calls from the depths of eternity
to be in our time,
You are the Spirit who pierces the membrane
between the earthly and the cosmic.

We praise and thank you, in the season of Advent as ever,

that as assuredly as you encompass the totality of all things
 in your creating hands,
 just as surely you hold each one of us closely and gently,
 regarding us the way loving parents regard their precious newborn child,
 with hopes and dreams for what they will do and who they will be.

Let us be your children now, great and loving God,
 even as you send your child to be one of us.

“O come to us; abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.”ⁱⁱⁱ Amen.

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ⁱ James Hollis, *What Matters Most* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 30.

ⁱⁱ William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), “The Magi,” public domain. It’s apparent how Hollis’s memory tricked him in recalling the closing lines of the poem. The full eight-line poem is:

Now as at all times I can see in the mind’s eye,
 In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
 Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
 With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,

And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,
 And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
 Being by Calvary’s turbulence unsatisfied,
 The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

ⁱⁱⁱ Phillips Brooks, “O Little Town of Bethlehem” (1868), public domain