

In the Beginning by Holly C. W. Aastuen
John 1:1-14 December 25, 2011

I like a recent posting I saw on the Internet. It was from Leonard Sweet a United Methodist preacher and theologian. He wrote, "Christmas Day is no time for a sermon."

He explains himself this way:

No, it is not that there is no time for a sermon because the choir sang so many beautiful Christmas songs. It is not because there is no time for a sermon because it took so long to seat the "Christmas crowd." It is not because the critters in the 'live' nativity scene got loose and ate all the Christmas cookies for coffee hour.

The reason that...there is 'no time for a sermon' is because on Christmas Day there is only time for each of us to discover 'a silence in which another voice may speak' (Mary Oliver, 'Praying') Today is the time for us to feel the gift of Christmas from the top of our heads to the tip of our toes, not 'hear' about it with our ears.

He goes on to describe what he calls the 'Christmas moment' where one feels the gift of Christmas in an experience that catches us by surprise, when we see a sight or hear a song or receive a hug that transports us from the craziness and chaos of the Christmas we see to the peace and joy and fulfillment we don't see and have an even harder time describing.

Until we experience a true "Christmas moment," he says, Christmas is crazy and chaotic.

But then that "Christmas moment" happens. And "the hopes and fears of all the years are met" in that moment in a person named Jesus.

Having that Christmas moment is not something we can control or evoke at a moment's notice. It is something we simply need to be prepared for when it comes. We need to keep an eye out for it.

It seems like these Christmas moments are secret. You don't hear about them in the stores, you don't hear it advertised on TV or see it in the colorful, slick pages that fall out of the Sunday paper.

But these Christmas moments are the things that really matter. They matter more than the Christmas presents you got that you thought were just perfect. They matter more than the Christmas presents you didn't get that you thought would have been perfect.

They matter more than the brightly colored things we read about in magazines or see on the Internet, more than the things we see in shop windows shown under bright lights against a backdrop of black velvet.

Everything we treasure, everything we save up to tell our closest friends, everything we enjoy remembering over and over again, everything that truly matters...is invisible.

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The invisible moments of joy come when we realize that the towering wonder of Almighty God chose to come in the form of a baby, when we experience the warmth of human connection with those we love, when we feel our spirits lifted by the experience of singing a Christmas carol. All of these experiences, these moments, are gifts that we notice, that we treasure when we take the time to see.

In the beginning I think they knew it. In that smelly stable filled with animals, I'd like to think that some of those who visited baby Jesus understood that something was happening there. Something significant and glorious and lovely had come to pass. They may not have been able to articulate what, exactly it was, but I do believe that the visitors on that first Christmas understood that this was no ordinary baby. The angels singing, the stars in the sky, all were pointing to the import of this event. They couldn't have missed that message, at least not entirely.

But I don't know that they knew, any more than we do, what to do with this momentous event. I'm not sure, other than telling everyone they could find about the amazing thing that had happened to them, that they knew what to do, what to say.

But maybe that isn't really what matters. Maybe what matters is that we do see the wonder and the joy and that we tell others about how we felt, what we saw and experienced in that Christmas moment.

I don't want to say that the tangible things of this celebration, the gifts we exchange and the foods that we enjoy together, all mean nothing. It's just that when things become visible and tangible, we sometimes make the mistake of thinking that we have something that we can possess, that we can have forever, that we can call 'mine,' and we forget to honor the love and care that the tangible gift points to.

Have you had your Christmas moment yet? Maybe it's coming yet today. Or maybe it won't happen until every last celebration of the season is done and the responsibility for pulling off another perfect celebration is completely off your shoulders.

Let's not forget that the whole point of Christmas is in invisible wonders like these that we cherish in our hearts. That is what the intent of Christmas was in the beginning—a visible means of pointing towards an invisible love. The chief wonder is that God chose to come to earth in the smallest, most vulnerable human form. Because, beyond all human logic and reason, God loves us. And the wonder and joy of that love, reflected in our human experience, is what matters at Christmas.

Look for that Christmas moment. Catch it when it and see the gift it points to—the gift of God's love come down to earth.