

Christmas

Does It Harken Us to Something?

Christmas . . . what do you visualize when you think about Christmas? Dancing lights, shimmering bulbs, air thick with the delicate aroma of turkey; wisps ascending from frothy cups of hot chocolate. Maybe your mind races warm with thoughts of carefully selected gifts, sugar cookies rendered brilliant by colored frosting and a dash of sprinkles, crackling fires laced with a hint of smoky hardwood, window panes etched delicate with frost. You might visualize friends and family, festive gatherings wrapped in something nearly magical; the taste of hope and good cheer faintly inching in around the edges of our lives. We may strive to see fresh hopes for the New Year teased out from the fading embers of the old one. We often see much indeed.

However, our reality might be real different from all that stuff. Our own upbringing may have left us with something that doesn't even remotely resemble any of this. In fact, for some of us our upbringing renders Christmas the stuff of childish imagination and myth. For yet others the holidays arrive heavy and chilled by pain as we recall dark childhood memories or find ourselves harkening back to the losses that we've incurred over the year.

Many of us hold everything we'd like Christmas to be up against everything that we see in the world. Many of our lives are played out in sharp contrast to the portrayed wonder of Christmas. What we see in various Christmas displays, the words that we hear in the carols, as well as both the stories and images spun during this season seem a world away and a lifetime removed from where we live our lives right now. Sure, we'd like our lives to be more like all of this, but in the hard reality of the day in and day out stuff they are not. And we know it.

Somehow it seems that somewhere deep inside of us we want all of the good stuff and all of the wonder and all the magic. We seem to desperately want to believe in it, or at least hope that maybe the tiniest piece of it might slip into our worlds as something very real and maybe even transforming. If only all of the messages and meaning of Christmas could be true and real . . . so we wish.

But where does that deep desire and wishing come from? Where did we get the concept of all of the things we pack into Christmas in the first place; goodwill and glad tidings and cheer and all? We look around the world out there and we don't see a bunch of that kind of stuff, at least not consistently. It's what we'd like the world to be like; the "gentler, kinder world" kind of thing; a world of courtesy and cooperation, of cherishing the fellowman; the world revolving on a pristine axis of grace and goodness. We see it on occasion when someone steps up and performs one of those heroic or sacrificial acts. But we don't see a whole bunch of that. Yet Christmas embraces it and we're thirsty for it.

A Deep Yearning

There seems a yearning for everything that Christmas portrays. Might it be that Christmas is in some way the embodiment of all of our hopes? Is it possible that we have dug deep and drawn up what we inherently know life should be like and transposed it on this particular holiday so that we might not forget what we hope for? Is there something that we're shaped for that's deeper than the life we have

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been able to create, so we have to script it and physically adhere it to this time of year so that it has a place where we can see it for but a brief season?

There is a deeper humanity within us that very few touch. We skirt it by busying ourselves with tasks, obligations and demands both small and grand. We are about the hurried business of living life while missing it in the very process of living it. There seems no time to look deep. If we are made deep then it would seem reasonable to assume that we should look deep and live deep. But inherently we do not do that and consequently our lives go wanting. I would conjecture that Christmas is in some respects the embodiment of something within us that doesn't get touched and is rarely held. It seems beyond us sometimes; embracing something much grander than who we've become but very much in keeping with who we are.

A Part of Ourselves Lost

It may likewise represent something lost; something left behind that was not supposed to be left behind. Maybe it's that child side of us that we abandoned for adulthood and the brutality of reality. It might be the loss of a tenacious hope that stands against all the adversity that comes slamming against us. It may well be an overriding sense of survival that pummeled and suffocated our sense of living. It could be that we have forgone the privilege of being uniquely ourselves in order to fit into what everyone wants us to be . . . or what we think they want us to be. Whatever it is that we lost, it's huge and it's debilitating and it's diminishing. It may well be that Christmas reminds us of some of that.

Hope Lost

It could be that Christmas and the message of Christmas is about hope. Maybe its "hope" that we see as frivolous, unrealistic and fanciful; the stuff of a good imagination but not workable in the real world. It seems that when we lose hope, what we lost was belief in that which we hoped in or hoped for. We no longer believe that the thing which we vested our hope in will deliver. Whatever we held onto, we see it as failing us and leaving us stranded to either find something else to cling onto, or attempting to hang onto ourselves. When hope is lost, all is lost.

An Opportunity

Does Christmas trigger something deep inside of you that tells you that you are more than you perceive yourself to be? Is it a holiday within which we have transposed and implanted hopes, dreams, beliefs, aspirations and values that inherently speak of who we are in the deepest places of our lives? Does it also trigger something lost that should not have been lost? Look deep this season, ponder deeply and grow as a priceless gift of the holiday season to you.