

# *Advent*

A WAITING NATION

# The Layer of Mystery and Wonder

December 20th, 2015

“The whole Christian story is strange. Frederick Buechner describes the Incarnation as “a kind of vast joke whereby the creator of the ends of the earth comes among us in diapers.” He concludes, “Until we too have taken the idea of the God-man seriously enough to be scandalized by it, we have not taken it as seriously as it demands to be taken.”

But we have taken the idea as seriously as a child can...The “idea of the God-man” is not strange or scandalous, because it first swam in the milk and butter on the top of our oatmeal decades ago. At that age, many things were strange, though most were more immediately palpable. A God-filled baby in a pile of straw was a pleasant image, but somewhat theoretical compared with the heart-stopping exhilaration of a visit from Santa Claus. The way a thunderstorm ripped the night sky...the rapture of ice cream—how could the distant Incarnation compete with those?

We get up with the Jesus story, until we outgrew it. The last day we walked out of Sunday School may be the last day we seriously engaged this faith.”

- Frederica Mathews-Green

“The implication of this is that at the end of this last batch of fourteen generations the time was ripe for something else to happen — something significant that would be at least as world-changing as the reign of David and the departure into exile in Babylon.”

- Paula Gooder, *Journey to the Manger*, pg 5

“Not only are they women but each of them is notorious in her own way.

Tamar resorted to a dubious subterfuge to trick her father-in-law into having sex with her so that her children could be counted as the children of her dead husband; Rahab was a prostitute who was willing to betray her city in order to protect the Israelites; Ruth, a Moabite, lay down ‘at the feet’ of Boaz (a phrase some take to be a euphemism for his genitals); and Bathsheba committed adultery with David... “My own view is that these women are included to defend Mary against any accusations of unworthiness. Like her, they could all be accused of moral failing in one way or another, according to the customs of their day, but despite that they remain a vital part of the grand story of God’s people. Whatever the cultural attitudes that prevail, these women cannot be written out of God’s story any more than Mary could... I love the idea of these four standing as defenders of Mary’s reputation. I have a mental image of this slightly rag-tag bunch of women, battered by life and what they had needed to do to survive it, standing shoulder to shoulder, chins lifted high, defiance in their eyes ready to defend the young Mary from accusations of unworthiness and disrepute.”

- Paula Gooder, Journey to the Manger, pg 7

JESUS literally means “The Lord saves!” or “God saves!”

EMMANUEL means “God with us.”

“Matthew citation of Isaiah 7:14 at the beginning of his narrative sounds a major keynote for his Gospel: Israel’s God is now present to his people precisely in the person of Jesus. In order to consider what it means to say of Jesus that he is Emmanuel, and in what sense God is made manifest in him, we must continue on through the story.”

- Richard Hays, Reading Backwards, pg 39

Genesis 12:2-3

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**”

"By placing the Magi in his Christmas story, as he had the Gentiles in his genealogy, Matthew wishes to say that God surmounts racial and moral barriers to his saving work by calling to the Son (fore and aft) those considered most unworthy. The Magi are walking illustrations of God's catholic grace: "I will show love to those who were called 'Unloved', and to those who were called 'Not-My-People' I will say, 'You are my people,' and they will answer, 'You are our God.'"

(Hosea 2:23)

Frederick Bruner, Matthew, A Commentary,

“Herod’s murderous acts, then, function within Matthew’s tale as a metaphor for all the history of Israel’s grief and exile. Yet even in the dark moment of Rachel’s grief, the echo of Jeremiah 31 offers comfort, beckoning God’s people to lean forward into the hope of the days that are surely coming when God—in the person of Jesus—will have mercy, bring back the exiles, and write the Law on their hearts.”

- Richard Hays, Reading Backwards, pg 43

*So Christ comes  
At the iron senseless time, comes  
To force the glory into frozen veins:  
His warmth wakes  
Green life glazed in the pool, wakes  
All calm and crystal trance with the living pains.*

From Christmas and Common Birth by Anne Ridler

*O come, O come, and be our God-with-us  
O long-sought With-ness for a world without,  
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.  
Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name  
Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,  
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,  
Be folded with us into time and place,  
Unfold for us the mystery of grace  
And make a womb of all this wounded world.  
O heart of heaven beating in the earth,  
O tiny hope within our hopelessness  
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,  
To touch a dying world with new-made hands*

O Emmanuel by Malcolm Guite