

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us...”

John 1: 14a

The First Sunday After Christmas

31 December 2017

The Risk of Birth

By Madeleine L'Engle

(read by Gerda Leveille)

This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war & hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn
That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honour & truth were trampled by scorn –
Yet here did the Saviour make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth.
And by a comet the sky is torn –
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Making the House Ready for the Lord

By Mary Oliver

(read by Nancy Harrington)

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but
still nothing is as shining as it should be
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an
uproar of mice – it is the season of their
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves
and through the walls the squirrels
have gnawed their ragged entrances – but it is the season
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly
up the path, to the door. And I still believe you will

(poem continues)

come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-geese, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

1st Corinthians 13 (A Christmas Version)

(read by David Baxter)

attributed to Sharon Jaynes

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows,
strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls,
but do not show love to my family,
I am just another decorator.
If I slave away in the kitchen,
baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals
and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime,
but do not show love,
I'm just another cook,
If I work at the soup kitchen, care at the nursing home
and give all I have to charity,
but do not show love,
it profits me nothing.
If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes,
attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata,
but do not focus on those I love the most,
I have missed the point.
Love stops the cooking to hug a child.
Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the spouse.
Love is kind, though harried and tired.
Love doesn't envy another's home
that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.
Love doesn't yell at kids to get out of the way, but
is thankful they are there to be in the way.
Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return
but rejoices in giving to those who can't.
Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.
Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust.
But the gift of love will endure.

Christmas Bells

(read by Brian Sahlin)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, written during the Civil War

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will towards men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
 Had rolled along
 The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will towards men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world evolved from night to day,
 A voice, a chime,
 A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, goodwill towards men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South
 And with the sound
 The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will towards men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
 And made forlorn
 The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will towards men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
 "For hate is strong.
 And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
 The wrong shall fail.
 The right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

The Work of Christmas

By Howard Thurman

(read by Brad Schide)

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and the princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.