

“Twas Eight Weeks After Christmas When All Through the Church ...”

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Selections from John 1

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‘Twas eight weeks after Christmas, when all thro’ the church,
the Christians were busy, the preacher was perched.
The stockings had hung by the chimney with care
but now were stacked neatly up under the stairs.

The crèches were nestled all snug in the shed,
Baby Jesus was swaddled and stored with his bed,
the trees that had glittered with lights and with balls
had been put in their closets down many a hall.

Poinsettias that once had sat on the floor here
had gone home with church members and then disappeared.
The Christmas Eve candles that made this place mystic
inspire the fire marshal to go quite ballistic.

The cards were recorded, set aside in a box,
the wreaths were let down and wrapped up in old socks.
The women who pack up – and always with cheer –
were nonetheless happy to finish the year.

The parties were over, their memories rung,
choir anthems were shelved, only once each year sung,
the calendar shifted, a new year arrived,
new elders ordained, others retired.

Committees did gather, new members in tow,
old rhythms returned to ... and that old Christmas glow
did fade from our mindset, well near disappeared,
for our work moves on quickly with every New Year.

Remember that old poem, the one with St. Nick?
“Now Dasher! Now, Dancer! On, Comet and Blitz!
Recall how that poet sat watching his roof
when reindeer came landing, the sounds of their hoofs
announcing *his* presence, with “ashes and soot;”
how down that tall chimney the visitor took?

I remember it well, my memory’s set,
“a bowl full of jelly” is hard to forget.
The magic of Christmas, in that poem, taking flight,
“Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!”

The whole season’s special, a thing to behold,
kindness to strangers, tall, short, young, and old.
People seem kinder, more patient, more gentle,
less hostile, less angry, less hurried, judgmental.

And then comes the New Year and it all starts to fade,
normalcy beckons, the messy rat race.
The season grows cold again, tempers do flare
and testiness, sadness, it's all in the air.

And not to be critical, but this I believe:
the church is quite different 'cuz Christ is its liege.
While we do turn 'round again and get back to work
we *remain* somewhat changed ... for we are the Kirk.

We're different from out there, our calling is clear
for God has come calling from far and from near.
While the church keeps on going, its task simple and plain
the seasonal spirit with us just remains.

Why is it different outside of those doors?
How is Christ's teaching so quickly ignored?
How can our people so easily change
when the season moves on with a calendar page?

What really is happening? Might this be the trick?
Were they waiting for Jesus, but settled for Nick?
For Nick is quite seasonal, he goes and he comes,
but Jesus is permanent; no sugar-plum.

Now the gospel of John can be quite hard to grip:
a difficult, theological, philosophical mix.
For those who want reindeer and long beards and magic
a story with sacrifice, and crucifixion, seems overly tragic.

But that's how John has it, in his first chapter explains
that light has come to us and always remains.
What is more, John declares – this Jesus we praise
is part of our God, and was, always.

Born Jesus, to Mary – catch this part of the plot –
this logos, this Christos, never was not.
Eternal. No start up. From the get-go, Divine.
Incarnate. God with us. Your savior and mine.

The seasonal rhythm, the cause for our joy
comes swaddled each Christmas as our own little boy.
And here's the mind bender, for months and for months,
he is everywhere, now, 'cuz he was there, once.

"... the word became flesh and lived in our midst,"
we witnessed it then, God's forever gift,
and no matter what, come what and come may,
he's with us still, day after day.

So Christians keep working and praying and pledging,
write budgets and sermons, intellectually stretching
for this Jesus we worship, this Lord and this light
keeps shining upon us, keeps making things right.

December is long gone, Valentines too,
to Old Saint Nick we say our adieu.
But the season of Christmas and all that it means
is still right here with us in our spiritual genes.

Its kindness, its justice, its beauty: all here.
Its patience, its promise, its essence: no fear.
The children remind us that the season of peace
has no need to founder, no reason to cease.

And with rancor and shootings and sadness around,
with homelessness, hunger all over our town,
what is needed and wanted and searched for out there
is abundant, and obvious, and available here.

So come with me now to that poem's happy ending,
and that white bearded friend his well wishes sending,
says, "Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night,"
we add this, from our God: "It will all be all right."

For the Word became flesh, full of grace, full of truth,
and say what you will from the top of your roof,
the Spirit of Christmas is alive, it is well,
for you are God's children, with you God does dwell.

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Verses from John 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. 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.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ... No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.