

FINDING CHRISTMAS GIFTS IN UNUSUAL PLACES

The Gift of Miracles

Matthew 11:2-11

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John the Baptist is the pivot, the hinge person of Bible history. Before him were Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos. Then 400 years of silence. Then John bursts on the scene, the forerunner of the Christ (vv.9-11).

Yet for all of his greatness, John's temperament and style caused him to miss the miraculous. John's question from prison (v. 3) contains the two sides of Israel's (and our) hope. The waiting of Advent is in this: Are you the one to come or are we waiting for another? John had been consistently preaching fire and brimstone, God's judgment. Then Jesus came preaching grace, forgiveness, love and kindness. John expected miracles. His problem was he was limiting God as to what kind of miracles. He was looking in the wrong places for miracles and looking for the wrong kind of miracles. But the miracles were right under his nose—read v. 4.

We miss miracles, too. They're right under our noses, but we look in the wrong places and for the wrong kind. Albert Einstein is reported to have said, "There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is." If you have to have everything in a test tube or mathematical formula, you'll struggle with the miraculous. If you insist on certainty and you have to know why, you'll struggle as John did.

Someone once observed that these days, it's fashionable to show you're intelligent by being skeptical. "We seem sophisticated when we say we don't believe..." [Oscar-winning filmmaker Guillermo Del Toro, *Time*. Feb. 18-25, 2019, p. 62]. But think of what we miss in life when our hearts are not open to miracles. Every breath we draw is a miracle., every pulsing throb of our hearts. If you were to ask me if I believe in miracles, I would reply, "Of course! We live on them. We can't make it through a day without experiencing them. Blood in our veins, oxygen in our lungs, the earth rotating just the right distance around the sun....and on and on.

How do we begin to live into the miraculous? Notice what Jesus told the disciples who were taking an answer back to John in prison (v. 4). "Pay attention to what you hear and see. Trust your spiritual senses." Do you ever wonder why we keep telling the same stories, singing the same songs, practicing the same faith over and over? Each Sunday, each Advent. We rehearse and rehearse, repeat and repeat. We do it because in the retelling, we sharpen our miracle detectors.

Think about it. The incarnation (God come in the flesh) opens us to a brand new world where the impossible becomes possible. The retelling of the coming of Christ keeps us open to the supernatural. We are people who live by the invisibles. Advent waiting is wide-awake waiting,

alert to micro miracles all along the way. It's a call to heightened awareness. Mysterious and beautiful visits from God are all around us—if we are tuned in and paying attention.

When we are our busiest, what do we do? We hurry and rush. What if we did what was counter-intuitive? What if, when we're our busiest, we slowed down? Henri Nouwen said the important Advent attitudes were open, free, flexible, receptive [*The Genesee Diary*, p. 196]. He reminded us that God only comes to dwell if we step back and give God room [*ibid.*, p. 170].

Have you noticed this about your life? Sometimes, the smallest of change can be the beginning of a miracle. It can be the trickle which becomes a rushing river. The smallest of things. Nearly every Advent I quote this third verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in."