

The Soldier in the Manger

Isaiah 63:1-6; Luke 2:29-35

It's Advent again, and it's a furiously hectic time of year. Advent is supposed to be a season of waiting, but there's precious little time to wait. We're anxiously rushing to celebrate the arrival of the King of Peace. Perhaps we may have a Silent Night of our own, but no time soon.

I've been thinking of what exactly we celebrate with such energy this season. I've grown increasingly annoyed with the noise pollution from the radios this year. The holiday music is artistically awful, and the message is vapid. What sane culture would exhaust itself physically and financially to celebrate Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and Frosty the Snowman? You've got to be kidding if this is the best we can find to celebrate. Perhaps Jesus is worth celebrating – but what Jesus? For many of us Christmas is about the baby in the manger. Part of the appeal of the Christmas holiday is the charm of the stable birth, the songs of the angels, and the friendly visit of the of the shepherds. Surely all this is part of the Christmas story, but there is so much more to it.

Let's think about those who are too poor to drive around shopping, or those who are on duty overseas. They need more than a cuddly baby this Christmas. They need a Savior who will rescue them from drudgery and danger, and give meaning to their desperate lives.

This year there are hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens fighting in the Middle East. Most of us here know Andrew Barshinger who shall soon go to Iraq. For them, part of the meaning of Christmas is that Jesus was born a soldier, whose destiny was to fight a terrible war.

We customarily read from Isaiah during Advent, selecting passages which foretell the coming of the Prince of Peace and the Reign of Righteousness. I don't recall that we have ever read Isaiah 63.

Who *is* this who comes from Edom,
With dyed garments from Bozrah,
This *One who is* glorious in His apparel,
Traveling in the greatness of His strength?
– “I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”
Why *is* Your apparel red,
And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?
“ I have trodden the winepress alone,
And from the peoples no one *was* with Me.
For I have trodden them in My anger,
And trampled them in My fury;
Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments,
And I have stained all My robes.
For the day of vengeance *is* in My heart,
And the year of My redeemed has come.
I looked, but *there was* no one to help,
And I wondered That *there was* no one to uphold;
Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me;
And My own fury, it sustained Me.

I have trodden down the peoples in My anger,
Made them drunk in My fury,
And brought down their strength to the earth.”
Isaiah 63:1-6

This is a picture of a victorious warrior. He possesses massive strength and wears stunning clothes. He marches invincibly across the land crushing everything in His path. You might say He subscribes to the military doctrine of overwhelming force. He is the embodiment of “shock and awe” tactics.

Who is this invincible warrior? Verse 1 tells us He is a righteous savior. Verse 4 tells us He is fighting to redeem. Verse 5 tells us that He saved *by himself*. No one else could help. That’s because it was a job too big for anyone but Him. This is Jesus! This is Jesus, the Savior of mankind and redeemer of His people. The Jesus who saves His own is the same Jesus who crushes His foes. In His anger He squishes them so their blood squirts all over Him. The gentle Jesus is also a fearsome warrior.

I wonder if Simeon was thinking about this when he met Mary and Joseph and their baby in the temple?

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
For my eyes have seen Your salvation
Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”

And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Luke 2:29-35

Simeon praised the baby as the Savior of the world , the Light of the Gentiles, and the Glory of Israel. What a beautiful statement. How poetic...

But then he prophesied of the rising and falling of people in Israel. This baby will *not* bring peace. He will divide Israel, and even tear open Mary’s own heart.

John brought all this together in his Revelation. Early in the revelation one of the elders told John that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to open the scroll. But when John looked, he saw a Lamb which appeared as though killed. You see, it won’t do to think simply of Jesus as a lamb. He is also a Lion, the conquering king. But neither is Jesus a brutal tyrant. The conquering King is also a gentle lamb.

It is important for us to remember this as we send our troops to war. War is ugly and

regrettable. But war is also noble and glorious. War for pride or profit is evil, but war to protect the innocent and establish justice is righteous. C. S. Lewis observed that Christians are so focused on the negatives of war, they forget the positives. If Jesus is a warrior, then war can be a godly calling. This Christmas let's encourage our troops to follow Jesus by fighting with a holy passion for peace and justice.

These are some of the reasons I so dislike the junk holiday around us. Christmas is not about Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and Frosty the Snowman. It is not even about the baby in the manger. It is about the warrior God who defeated the power of sin, crushed the head of Satan the serpent, and set us free. Our God came as a baby who was born a soldier. We need a soldier strong enough to rescue us from sin. We need a soldier brave enough to defeat Satan. Nothing other than a soldier can set us free. This Christmas let's celebrate the coming of the soldier in the manger.

C. David Green
Lehigh Valley Presbyterian Church
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