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Keep the Earth in Christmas

Carol Meyer | Dec. 21, 2010 Eco Catholic

The Earth is probably the last thing most people are focused on at Christmas. It?s just an inert, unimportant backdrop for the joyous reality of Christ?s birth, right? Not if we look a little deeper. In spite of poor theology that might portray it that way, Christmas is not about a pie-in-the-sky reality, a fleeing from this depraved realm of created matter.

So let?s look at some of the connections between Christmas and a renewed height="138" width="211" earthiness and acknowledgment of God?s action in creation. We don?t really know the details of Jesus? birth, but all the mythology centers around very earthy things: a journey by donkey under open skies, animal and dung smells in a stable mingling with the sweetness of baby breath, shepherds guarding their drowsy flocks via moon and star shine. Then there?s the drama of a scandalous pregnancy, no lodging in a strange city, and a jealous, murdering king. This birth is no other-worldly event, but emerges out of the glory and chaos of the natural world and its inhabitants.

The message seems to be that redemption is found right here and now in the errant stuff of life. God is not far removed, sitting on a celestial throne reading his newspaper, now and then glancing down to frown at the whole muddled endeavor. Our theology says that God is everywhere, which means God is here.

I recall a chilling scene in the movie, *All the Pretty Horses*, where a guard in a Mexican prison says to the incoming captive, ?God is not here.? I thought about that a lot. God was there, is there in the worst and most evil of situations. We?ve never really grasped incarnation, the Word made flesh?the flesh of whales, of rocks, of galaxies, of water, of plants, and yes, of humans. God has been incarnate all along. Jesus birth and life just shed light on the reality.

I don?t know why we?ve tried so hard to deny our earthiness or God?s. We?ve tried to make everything of God miraculous, non-material, or occurring outside of nature. How freeing that we don?t need to do that. We can relax knowing that our imperfect and sinful lives are the locus of God?s activity, as are the amazing processes of creation. As many of us experience the downside of this 2010 Christmas season--the loneliness, the fears, the painful family dynamics, and the sad state of world affairs--it doesn?t seem like the light has overcome the darkness or that there is much reason for hope.

But just as the days have grown the darkest, the coldest, and most barren, that?s when things start turning around in nature. Our ancestors in faith picked this winter season to celebrate Christmas for good reason. They were trying to say, ?Look, with God, all things are possible. Stay trusting even when reality looks bleak. God?s grace and light are present even when you don?t see them.?

In our turbulent times, it?s difficult to see how Jesus is the savior of the world, the prince of peace, or the light of nations. His kingdom is not yet, but there are signs of hope and transformation even amid the gloom. Christmas is not primarily about the sweet baby of pious carols, but about the much more compelling (and challenging) adult Jesus who turned our worldview upside-down, and who now, as the cosmic Christ, is working quietly and yet powerfully in us, in all world events, and in creation to fulfill the loving plan of God.

May the faithful light of the sun warm your winter days, and may the enduring love of Christ warm your heart and give you hope. A blessed Christmas to you!
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