

Everything is Holy Now

Tears filled my eyes as I carefully picked up each nativity figure made of porcelain and real cloth and put it back into its styrofoam mold- Mary, Joseph, the wise men, the shepherds, the angel..... I was always sad to take down my nativity set after Christmas but I had never cried over it before.

This year Christmas was still a month away - I had only days ago *unpacked* my nativity set-- but I no longer believed in what these figures represented and seeing them there in their usual place on the mantle just reminded me of my loss. Part of me knew it was time to move on while the other half of me was frantically trying to hang on to an old belief system that no longer held water. The truth was I didn't know how one lived without knowing there is a God in charge of the world and a certain afterlife where you will be reunited with all the people you love.

"Why are you taking down your nativity set already?" My husband asked, looking concerned when he saw my face.

"I have wasted enough years living a lie," I responded. "This never happened. There wasn't a star that shone over Bethlehem, angels never sang to the shepherds and Jesus is not the son of God. There is no God."

My husband paused slightly as if to consider if his words would help or hurt, then said cautiously,

"There is no Santa either and you still put him on top of the tree."

“I guess he’ll be the next to go then,” I countered darkly.

Funny my husband should mention Santa because there was a correlation. Putting the nativity set away and feeling so bereft was reminding me of the Christmas when I learned for certain there was no Santa Clause-- and made my parents confirm it. That Christmas fell very flat. Even though I knew mom and dad would still give me presents, knowing there wasn’t a Santa was the first experience I had of losing someone I valued. Before discovering he wasn’t real I felt like me and Santa had a great thing going and I believed in him with all my heart. With 6 kids on a jr. high school teacher’s salary we usually had no money to spare yet Santa *always* came through and brought me the *exact* toy that I asked for-- every year without fail.

I tried to hold up my end of the agreement by being good and even though I sometimes failed it seemed I was good enough for Santa--that’s why I loved him. Now, not what turned out to be a one-sided relationship, but a whole belief system of a loving personal God and a certain afterlife was dieing under the harsh light of my new perspective. There were parallels.

With drastic change it is hard to look back and remember the exact route that gets you to a whole new place but I do remember some of the biggest landmarks. Without doubt I am indebted to many who were further along the path than I was-- both people in my new UU faith and the authors of books that I read. The President of our board at the time was a huge *Carl Sagan* fan and had me read *Cosmos*. When I came upon these words they stopped me in my tracks,

“A religion old or new, that stresses the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.” Sagan

also said, *“We make our world significant by the courage of our questions and the depth of our answers.”* These words made it to my fridge so I could ponder them further.

It was also this Christmas of no nativity on the mantle when I taught a Sunday School class and came upon Sophia Fahs wise words.

“Every Night a Child is Born is a Holy Night”

And so the children come.

And so they have been coming.

Always in the same way they come —

Born of the seed of man and woman.

No angels herald their beginnings,

No prophets predict their future courses,

No wise men see a star to point their way

To find a babe that may save humankind.

Yet each night a child is born is a holy night.

Fathers and Mothers —

Sitting beside their children’s cribs —

Feel glory in the wond’rous sight of life beginning.

They ask: “When or how will this new life end?

Or will it ever end?”

Each night a child is born is a holy night.

She wasn’t wrong. I couldn’t deny the miracle that was each one of my children. I also read Rachel Remen and loved her saying, *“An unanswered question is a **fine** traveling companion. It sharpens the*

eye for the road." My upbringing only valued answers but I was starting to understand the rich ground of questioning.

By the time I heard the song *Holy Now* by Peter Mayar he echoed what I had come to believe,

Wine from water is not so small

But an even better magic trick

Is that anything is here at all

So the challenging thing becomes

Not to look for miracles

But finding where there isn't one

Now my nativity sits in its place of honor and I can love Christmas with no reservation once again. True, this time of year, I resonate more with celebrating the Solstice on the longest night of the year but I don't begrudge Jesus his manger or have any need for that story to be true. I now thank my lucky stars that I got to awake to a world where everything is a miracle.