

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Christmas

One of the wonders of Christmas is that it is so unexpected. You might even call it unnatural.

At the darkest moment of the year, when the sun is scarce and the earth is frozen, we sing.

We gather in groups and carol. We go outside and select evergreens, and drag the trees into our homes and cover them with colored glass balls.

We string lights on our homes and place candles in our windows. We erect plastic reindeer on the front lawn and an inflatable fat man on our roof.

We spend hours wrapping boxes in brightly colored paper. We send cards. We drink eggnog. We hang mistletoe. We go to parties and dinners and eat too much pumpkin pie. We resolve to lose weight. And then we eat fruitcake. And cookies.

We do all this, and more, at a time when sane and sensible creatures are hibernating. We do not hibernate. No. We revel.

We insist, again and again, year after year, that we will beat back the encircling darkness and rejoice. Let nothing you dismay. We wish you a merry Christmas. Tidings of comfort and joy? You bet. And fruitcake.

Taken as a whole, the season is reckless and a little bit mad. It makes no sense.

But seen in context, it is something else entirely.

What we are doing, after all, is the human embodiment of something that we can only deem a miracle.

What we are enacting—what we are celebrating and reveling in—is the hope of generations finally realized. What we are living is Incarnation. God is with us. Cue the angels!

So, what seems unreasonable and unexpected and unnatural is, in fact, sensible. There is logic to it all, after all. We are defying the darkness because *He* did. In an act of unprecedented grace and love, God became us. He entered into human history, to light The Way—and nothing has ever been the same.

How fitting, then, that we revel. How fitting that we light the gloom and surround ourselves with color. How appropriate that we indulge our appetites, baking a ham and slicing up the turkey. Bring on the cookies!

In this annual celebration of salvation, we celebrate life. We celebrate the cycles of the seasons. And we celebrate, I think, second chances. Christmas is about a beginning. The birth of a child to an otherwise anonymous couple over two millennia ago gives us all reason to hope. That infant grew up to teach us another path, a way built on charity and mercy and justice—a way built, as well, on conversion of heart.

That astonishing truth is one of the truly enduring wonders of this feast—more filling than fruitcake, more startling than stars strung on gutters, more stirring than even the heartiest eggnog.

Christ is born. We are saved. Behold: the one Christmas gift that keeps on giving, no matter what.

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