

Easter 3B 2018

There is another Christmas Carol that speaks to the Easter Story as much as it does to the birth of Jesus. It is good to return to the Christmas celebrations, not because of the high holiday, but without Easter, Christmas doesn't make sense! The story of the incarnation, in itself, is wonderful, but without the purpose, it is just a time of nice songs, giving gifts and putting on a few pounds!

Coming into Easter, it is a time of challenging songs, exchanging peace, and still, putting on a few pounds!

There is one children's carol that comes to mind for today, and it is simply based on three questions. They are: do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear? and Do you know what I know?

Firstly, do you see what I see?

A star, a star, dancing in the night with a tail as big as a kite, a tail as big as a kite.

So, the song begins to tell us aspects of the story of Jesus' birth. This part relates to the gospel as told to us by Matthew. The birth of the child Jesus is noticed in the stars, and astronomers of the East see it in the sky. The tail as big as a kite, certainly just a rhyming device alludes to probably what many think it was: a comet. Certainly, it would have brought fascination to those reading the heavens.

Behind that story, which we know as the *Epiphany*, the time of manifestation to the Gentiles, is the prophetic realisation that the birth of Jesus is not just to bring salvation to the people of Jerusalem, but the entire world. Luke's gospel picks it up as well in the prophecy of the prophet Simeon: *to be a light to lighten the gentiles*. In the timeline, Simeon's words certainly appear before the gift bearers. At the heart of this picture is the salvation of all God's people.

Do you hear what I hear?

A song, a song, high above the trees with a voice as big as the seas,
with a voice as big as the seas.

More suspect poetic devices, but again, a heralding of truth. The song turns its attention to the Gospel of Luke and the appearance of the heavenly host to the shepherds. The song that they sing, is one of great news and joy, and the intensity is overwhelming. The song actually references the Book of Psalms, Psalm 93 verses 3 to 5

The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice,
The floods lift up their pounding waves.

More than the sounds of many waters, Than the mighty breakers of the sea, The LORD on high is mighty.

Your testimonies are fully confirmed; Holiness befits Your house, O LORD, forevermore

The testimony of the angels is fully confirmed, and this news is forever.

Then, we return back to Matthew. At this stage, the scholar in me is suspecting that what the song writer is doing is acting as the Gospel known as Q, or Quelle. It is a German name that means *source*. It is held that the gospels of Matthew and Luke borrow heavily on Mark, and another document called Q.

Could this be a 'James Bond' moment in the story? Q, of course, is the name given to the Quartermaster of the Secret Service. The Quartermaster is responsible for administering barracks, laying out the camp, and looking after supplies. In one movie, Q was female, and was known as Q-ute. No surprise there's sexism in a Bond saga!

So, let's bring in agent Q to the story of Jesus' birth, and see what materials are required:

Do you know what I know?

A child, a child, shivers in the cold, let us bring him silver and gold;
let us bring him silver and gold.

Now, I don't know about you, but the silver and gold would only be good for buying blankets and paying the gas for the heating, but in terms of knowledge, what is being said here is that the birth of this child surpasses all the gold and silver in the world. This is something that only too well had dawned on Herod. The need to know where the child was becoming paramount in the story to bring an end to the prophecy the seers from the East were bearing.

Then, there are the last two verses.

The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night, he will bring us goodness and light,
he will bring us goodness and light.

And now, a reference to the Gospel of John, and an indirect summary of the Gospel of Mark. This child is the Saviour of the Word; and the light that will shine in the darkness that cannot be comprehended.

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And this is where we find the disciples today. They are in the presence of the light, yet, they are not comprehending. And immediately the fifth verse of the carol is brought into play:
Listen to what I say; pray for peace people everywhere.

Look at my hands and my feet: touch and see; and he eats in their presence. I told you all about his: *Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.* (Luke 24 46b-48)

In the first letter of John, chapter 3, John implores his readers that this is indeed the case.

1 John 3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

For the moment, the disciples, fully in the presence of Jesus, fail to see him as he is, for they were still afraid. It is early days in the story of Jesus' resurrection. They still seem to need proof. What more proof could Jesus offer them than show himself, touch them, eat with them and be with them? No, there is still more to come. They will need help in this, as we also need help with spreading this wonderful news now.

Jesus indeed does promise them help: he will send another, an Advocate, a Spirit of Grace that will empower and equip them all to do this. He tells them, *I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.*

Sisters and brothers, thankfully, through our baptism, we know this is the Holy Spirit, the promised presence of Pentecost, to which our eyes and ears now turn.

Maybe, if we were to write another verse to the song, it could go like this:

Said the Holy Spirit to people everywhere:

Do you feel what I feel? Do you feel what I feel?
Spread the news to people everywhere:
Do you feel what I feel? Do you feel what I feel?
A flame, a flame, undivided flame
that will tell the glory of His name:
that will tell the glory of His name.

And so, we wait, like the disciples, or do we?

No, we pray, and we sing out what we know. Jesus was born, heralded by the prophets and sung about by the angels; revealed to the poor and meek; lauded by the rich and famous; threatened by those who knew better; and ultimately destroyed by those who preferred the darkness of power rather than light and love.

And yet, death could not contain him.

The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness just didn't comprehend it.

- So, do you see what I see? Jesus Christ is risen.
- Do you hear what I hear? There is good news just waiting to be told.
- Do you know what I know? Yes, but can we get our heads around it?
- Do you listen to what I say? That is your choice, but know this:
- Do you feel what I feel? Blessed. Empowered. Loved.

And this will bring goodness and light.
this will bring us goodness and light.