



DAY 19

Thursday, December 20

(Candle of Joy)

MATTHEW 1:23

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, ‘God with us’”

Symbols: Channels of Christmas Grace

by John Harutunian

John is a musicologist who has been attending Park Street Church since the pastorate of Harold J. Ockenga. John presently serves as organist at Newton Presbyterian Church and spends his summers giving dramatic readings of the Narnia Chronicles to campers at Camp Brookwoods.

Why do images and symbols speak so powerfully to us at Christmastime? Childhood memories of midnight visits by St. Nicholas, of gifts under the tree, of frolicking through enchanted snowy wonderlands—these touch us at a profound level. Could it be that we sense in our hearts that the miracle that occurred two thousand years ago is so great that words alone cannot fully express it? God, the Ultimate Mystery, put on our human nature: not just our human bodies, for Jesus Christ was not simply man “externally” and God “internally.” For the nature of a thing is precisely what it is internally—on the inside. Hence, in Jesus Christ God came to know human loneliness, human helplessness, human pain, and ultimately human death. And not merely in a cognitive way, but experientially by having assumed our own nature.

As we come face to face with this miracle, words fail us. So it is the sights and sounds associated with the miracle that inevitably take over our consciousness. Glowing lights, Christmas tree ornaments, sparkling tinsel, the sound of carols, even things as seemingly mundane as the aromas of gingerbread and plum pudding: these phenomena now assume center stage in our minds. And for one all-too-brief moment, we suspend our

adult incredulity and re-enter a state of receptive childlike wonder (a state, we’re reminded, without which no one can see the Kingdom of God). And in doing so, we actually feel at home here on this earth.

Why? Because God Himself once made his home here on this earth. In a little town called Bethlehem. And at every Christmas, we sense—through these symbols—the afterglow of his Incarnate presence.

RESPOND:

DO: Make a list of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and images that remind you of the meaning of Christmas.

PRAY: God, help me to be sensitive to your continued presence in whatever ways You may choose to communicate it to me.