

The Spark of Divine Love
A Reflection on the Meaning of Christmas

by Dorothy C. Buck

For many the annual celebration of Christmas has become a tradition of gathering together as a family, decorating the house, sharing tried and true family recipes and sharing gifts. It is a commercial holiday and not a holy day. I have been reflecting on the origins of Christmas and the significance of the Christmas story itself for many years and share those reflections here:

Of course many folks know the basic story as it is told in two of the Christian scriptures known as the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. There is a young woman, not yet married, but betrothed to a man named Joseph, who receives a visit from an angel of God announcing that the Divine Spirit will overshadow her and she will bear a child even though she "has had no relations with a man". She is told that her cousin, Elizabeth is in her 6th month of pregnancy even though she is well past child-bearing age as a way for her to believe the angel's words. The teen-age Mary's "Yes" to the angel has become an icon for faith and trust in the Divine Word. Thus the story begins of Joseph's dream, a miraculous birth after an arduous journey due to an obligatory Census causing Joseph to travel to Bethlehem with Mary who is soon to give birth. The story includes angels appearing to lowly shepherds in a field, Astronomers from the East following a star that leads them to the sight of the birth of a holy child named Jesus, born in a manger, since in Bethlehem "there was no place in the Inn."

But what is the deeper meaning of this story for us today? Every year Christian believers revisit this story in churches all over the world but this isn't "just a miracle story". This innocent, helpless child will grow up to have a life-changing effect on the course of human history. In the poverty of this humble environment, the mysterious Creator of the Universe entered human life, not riding on a magnificent white steed, adorned with ornaments and clothed in shining armor and majesty but rather in the form of a tiny, helpless, dependent infant through the very real human labor pains of his mother. It is here that the real meaning of Christmas, (Christ's Mass) begins.

We are being told in graphic terms who God is and who we are. It is the very beginning of the all-inclusive nature of Divine Love that this child would one day

model for the world. The lowliest of the social order of the time, shepherds guarding their flocks, are invited to be the first to witness to the incarnation of the Divine into human life. Strangers, foreigners "from the East", arrive dressed as royalty bearing gifts that foretell the future story of this newborn child, as yet unknown. All, from the lowliest to the majestic are welcome in this story. There is no one excluded, no strangers seen as "alien" in this universal message of new life. This child, Jesus, is every human child born into this world "made in the image and likeness of God". Imagine that! A universal experience of the labor pains of women from every walk of life, in peace and in war-torn countries alike, giving birth to Divine Love in the world.

What if we became aware that this story is an invitation to all of us to give birth to divine and human life; to bring the unconditional Love of the Divine into our everyday lives; that every year, as we enter into the Christmas Season we are being led into a deeper recognition of who we are meant to be and who this Divine child is calling us to become. Giving birth to love in our world is not a bad way to celebrate Christmas especially when the world is caught in cycles of never-ending war and violence. And there is more to the story. Any Mom who has given birth to a child, and every Dad, knows the challenge of nurturing, soothing, feeding and bathing infants. It is exhausting, sometimes an overwhelming responsibility because children are entirely dependent on us. That is the story of Mary and Joseph who surely would have had the same challenges that we have. And that is the rest of the Christmas message for us; we are being invited to nurture and feed that nascent spark of Divine Love within us in order to become that Divine image and likeness in our broken and suffering world. This child Jesus is being born within each one of us, renewing our sense of the meaning of Christmas and of life itself every year. They called him "Prince of Peace" and if we are to strive for peace on earth there is no better place to start.