

in the beginning...

A Very Old Soul

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John 1:1-5

THE TYPICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE MODERN HOMO SAPIENS is that history begins on the date of his or her birth. Before that, emptiness. Blackness. Void. And if, by chance, there was anything pre-dating the individual's launch into existence, it is utterly immaterial. Pointless. Boring.

Now, while history itself began long before the date of our birth, *our* history did not. Our personal history began, to be precise, at our conception—approximately nine months before our untidy entry into this world. Before that, we did not exist beyond the glimmer in our father's eye.

*Reflections
by the Pond*

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The biography of Jesus, however, “begins” in the self-illuminated halls of eternal heaven, uncountable eons before that fateful day in Bethlehem. The person Jesus—male child, homo sapiens, flesh—was, indeed, born in that dung-scented stable in, approximately, 6 B.C. But the One who became Jesus for man—Son of God, second person of the Trinity—was, as the apostle John writes, “in the beginning.”

When we stand before our nativity set and gaze upon the tiny figurine of the Christ child, we are looking at nothing less than the incarnation (“in flesh”) of God Himself.

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.”

John 14:8-11

The Child of Christmas was a brand new baby, but a very old soul. We cannot say with certainty how well-informed His infant consciousness was regarding His divinity, but we can say with certainty that His divinity was there. For the Son of God does not post-date God the Father. Both are from “the beginning.”

To human ears, the word “beginning” denotes a starting—a point in time when nothing becomes something. If I begin to chop wood, it is because a moment before I was not chopping wood. If my car begins to run, it is because a moment before it was not running. If I begin writing a letter, it is because just moments before the letter did not exist.

But the rules are different in heaven. God did not have a “beginning” as we understand that word. He—that is, the triune God consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—was before everything and anything else. Time and space do not have the same hold on God that they do on us; He exists outside of them. This applies to Jesus. As Merrill C. Tenney translates the first phrase of John 1:1 from the Greek,

When the beginning began, the Word was already there.

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

The world tries mightily to dissociate us from the authentic well-spring of Christmas. Some attempts, though misguided, are righteous and good—even noble. The world tries to convince us that Christmas is all about charity, good will, generosity, all the while stripping out of the holiday its real name, insipidly renaming even its ubiquitous tree to “holiday” tree. More than that, every year the world beats us about the ears with its yuletide preoccupation with extravagant consumption, begging us to spend hundreds of dollars on each of our kids—all, of course, in the “spirit of Christmas.”

None of it matters, for none of it has anything to do with the *real* Christmas. Christmas is not about trees (by any name), charity, giving, turkey dinners or expensive gifts.

The *true* “Spirit of Christmas” was incarnated about two thousand years ago as a baby, suckled by His teenage mother in a filthy stable. When He came, this Spirit was already ancient—older than time itself.

If we are to celebrate Christmas, we are to do it on our knees. We, like the magi, are to bow before very God in flesh, God who condescended to dirty Himself with the mud and muck of His creation—not with its sin, but certainly with its humanity. He could have remained

in the purity and untarnished joy of heaven. Instead, out of His compassion and love, He came down to us.

*O worship the king, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing, His power and His love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.*

*O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.*

*Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.*

*Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender! how firm to the end!
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend.*

Robert Grant