

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Glimpses of hope. One of the things I love most about Christmas is the reassurance of the Christmas story. Every year, in the retelling, it stirs in us fresh glimpses of hope for new beginnings.

Out of whatever mess we make of things—whatever sadness or grief burdens our spirit, whatever failure or rejection darkens our day, every year the voice of the prophet sounds out: *a child is born/ a son is given.*

Glimpses of hope are what we are called to. Glimpses of possibility that nudge us to a fresh awareness that we are *not* prisoners of our past.

We know we live in a flawed and fallen world. The recent, tragic violence in Mumbai, India reminds us of that. As does the almost-daily violence in our schools—even elementary schools here in our own communities.

And everywhere, it seems, there’s an itchy greed and short-term, immediate gratification impulses dominating the moment. Everybody’s looking out for *number one*, responding too often to emotions rather than to a reasoned thought process.

But hush, already! Enough of the sordidness of life! We read and hear the news all the time and it wears us down. Fair enough! But you know what? We don’t have to live there. We don’t have to be prisoners of yesterday. We can build on the good news of today, on the glimpses of hope that today brings.

We can take the best that God gives us today and make something of it—whatever it is. We can start again and, together, we can *transform* the world. Together, we can call people to the high ground of the *Christmas moment*.

The Christmas moment. And what is that moment? It is a moment for all religions and for all humanity. It is a *warming of the earth*, as love reaches out from a bed of straw at the manger in Bethlehem.

Around the world, in the mountainous borders of Pakistan; in the devastation and ruin of Darfur, Sudan; in the treeless hillsides and poverty of Haiti; in the inner cities of war-torn Iraq; in the uneasy hallways of our schools here in the states; in the repugnant opulence of too many corporate board rooms across the land ...

Wherever it is that darkness looms; wherever it is that cynicism abounds—the darkness and cynicism that don’t know love and that can’t hear the voice of the God of *new beginnings*; in all of these places God says:

Come, all of you, into my presence. No matter your group or your religion; no matter anything about you. Come, and be blessed in my presence, and begin again.

For wherever the Christ child is born—which is anywhere and everywhere—new beginnings are possible.

Let the following *glimpse of Christmas* be a *warming* of hearts everywhere this holiday season:

A glimpse of the meaning that lives on. The day was frightfully cold, with swirls of snow in the air, and I was looking out the living room window which faces our church. Workmen had just finished constructing the annual *Nativity* scene in the church yard when school let out for the day. As children gathered excitedly around the crèche, they didn't stay long. It was far too cold for lingering.

All the children hurried away ... except for a little girl of about six. The wind lashed at her bare legs and caused her coat to fly open in the front, but she was oblivious of the weather. All her attention was riveted on the statues before her. Which one, I couldn't tell. Was it Mary? The baby Jesus? The animals? I wondered.

And then I saw her remove her blue woolen head scarf. The wind and cold must have chilled even more her perky, red cheeks. It didn't matter. She had only one thought in mind as she, lovingly, wrapped her scarf around the statue of the baby Jesus. After she had covered it, she patted the baby and then kissed it on the cheek. Satisfied, she skipped on down the street, her hair frosted by the cold.

In and through the story, we glimpse anew who we are and the heights to which love calls us. Again, it's all about the love and God's undimming hope for peace on earth .