

The World As It Might Be

Christmas Eve Meditation

24 December 2011

I wonder if you saw the news story yesterday about one of the latest innovations in smart car technology. I picked it up on CBS News where reporter Mark Strassman was test driving the Volvo XC60 which has installed in it one of the latest accident avoidance systems. Using radar to track the position of cars and pedestrians on the road, the car can stop on the proverbial dime before it hits the car travelling ahead or the pedestrian who suddenly runs out in front.

This newest Volvo is a prototype, said the company representative. It is still under development and a lot more work needs to be done to refine its technology before it can be released to the general public. Pressed by the reporter for a timeline, he predicted that, within a decade, most cars on the road would carry such systems as standard equipment, and probably would cut in half the thousands of deaths and injuries that now regularly take place.

Now, I don't know about you, but I am always amazed and encouraged when I see coverage of such promising developments whether they are to do with road safety, or a new treatment for cancer, or new drugs to treat mental health conditions, or new ways in which computer technology can be adapted to help the physically challenged interact with the world around them.

When we see such developments highlighted in the news, we know that they may not come to fruition for quite some time. We are fully aware that the full benefits of such discoveries may not be realised for 5, 10 or 20 years – or even within our own lifetime. But the wonderful thing, the enjoyable thing, is they give us a an insight into what the future holds. They give us a glimpse, however fleeting, into the world as it might be.

The world as it might be. I wonder if that is exactly why we love Christmas. Why we love to come to Church on Christmas Eve. Why we love to sing carols. Why we love nativity plays. Why we love Bethlehem Live. Why we love hearing Handel's *Messiah*. Because we get a glimpse of the world as it might be. For a few fleeting moments we are able to see past all the frustrations and problems of the moment, to a kinder, gentler, more tolerant and peaceful world - something that so often seems to be missing amidst the depressing reality of our everyday lives.

Yes, I think we all love to dream about the world as it might be – all of us, no matter who we are.

In her book, *The Vigil: Keeping Watch in the Season's of Christ's Coming*, Wendy Wright tells of how her church choir went to sing in a smoke-filled, noisy homeless shelter one Christmas Eve. A dishevelled man came up to her. He was wearing a soiled jacket and was

under the influence of either drugs or alcohol. And he asked if she would sing with him his favourite Christmas song, "O Holy Night". She rather hesitantly agreed and the room grew silent as their two voices joined together. She said, "He leaned on the edge of a tattered sofa, 3ft from me, his eyes closed, the tired creases of his street weary face softened as he sang."

After a few moments, they reached the part of the song that went: "Long lay the world in sin and error pining; 'Til he appeared and the world felt its worth A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices As yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!" As he strained his gravelly voice to give wings to the song's words, tears streamed down his face. Said Wendy Wright, "I knew, at that moment, that his longing and mine were one, and that the burning for the fulfilment of the promise I felt was not only mine but was etched on the human heart."

Yes, no matter who we are, or where we are in life, we love Christmas because it gives us such a wonderful, if only fleeting, glimpse of the world as it might be. A world where there is no more hunger. No more fighting. No more pain. No more suffering. A world full of tolerance. A world full of harmony. A world filled with the love and the hope that Jesus brought to earth as a baby so long ago.

I wonder if you and I here tonight can glimpse the world as it might be. If so, then we can start to make it a reality by working, each in our own way, to make it so. We can do it, for instance, by saying the word of forgiveness. We can do it by reaching out to the less fortunate. We can do it by expressing the word of hope. We can do it by encouraging someone who is overwhelmed by life's problems. We can do it by helping cheer the sad, comforting the bereaved and befriending the lonely. We can do it by becoming makers of peace. Making peace among our families and friends and in our workplace. And making peace by letting that peace begin with ourselves.

It may be a long way off and take a long time before we can bring to reality the world as it might be. But as the old proverb says, "A journey of a thousand miles always begins with the first step." Let us celebrate Christmas by taking that very step tonight. And by taking it in the name of him who was born in Bethlehem, 2000 years ago, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

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