

THE MORNING AFTER

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December 25, 2022

Texts: Isaiah 52:7-10 and Matthew 1:18-25

This Christmas morning, the morning after the events of that night when Jesus was born, I wonder what the perspective of day might lend to thoughts about what happened in the night. Did it seem a dream or a holy wonder? In my wondering, the rhythms of Dr. Seuss began to echo in my mind one again, as they do from time to time, inspired by the books I read in my youth – and occasionally as an adult. So, with a host of pajama-clad kids here this morning, it seems an apt time to consider: perhaps the morning after might be described something like this:

If you've had a rough night and sleep's still in your eyes
But the world is awaking and telling you, "Rise!"
From the place you've been sleeping and dreaming, but say,
Might what **was** in the night seem a dream in the day?
For what happened last night when the world was asleep
Is much more than is usual, for a sleep that is deep
And the memory is one that you surely will keep
And describe for your kids at your feet in a heap.

It is more than a dream, a miraculous thing
That would cause hosts of angels to come down and sing
And to share the good news with a prayer and a wing...
But I'm getting ahead of the start of this tale
So I'd better back up and begin with the trail
Of the couple whose child would make angels cry, "Hail!"

It started out badly for those who would travel
As all the good plans of the night did unravel
For rooms were all full at the inn where they came
And they made no exception for Mary by name
So Joseph, with no reservations, gets blamed.

She was bearing a child who was close to arriving
Due to bumps on the donkey – (not as smooth as if driving)
And the innkeeper, ready to turn them away,
then had a bright thought of a place they could stay
That was out in the stable with a bed made of hay.

So off the two went to bed down with the ox
And the cow and the donkey and some chickens and cocks
And a handful of mice that slept in the box
Where the beasts ate the hay – a bed softer than rocks!

That stable was home to the beasts for the night
And that night it was home to the couple whose flight
To the hometown of David met prophet's insight
'bout the place where a savior would come as the light
for a world that was desperately needing set right.

In the wee morning hours when the world was all still
'cept the dogs that were barking aloud on the hill
And the wind that was whistling like a dentist's old drill,
And the loud-awful snoring of Jill and old Bill,
The baby arrived after hours of labor
For the poor mother Mary who had thought that the favor
Of God for her child would perhaps, maybe save her
From the pains of delivery like her friends and her neighbor.

He was born in the night, a remarkable child,
Whose first bed was a manger with straw that was piled
To make soft the wee place where his mother so mild
Laid her baby wrapped up in some cloths undefiled.
His parents were awed by the sight and the sounds
Of this child whose arrival had fractured the bounds
Between heaven and earth, between skies and the grounds,
Between human and God – and he weighed just six pounds!

But while this new family was filled with such awe
Some shepherds were hearing their sheep bawling, "Baa!"

For something was stirring them out in the field
At a time when the night was not ready to yield
To the dawn's early light which the night had concealed.

What startled the sheep, then the shepherds by turn,
Was a bevy of angels from whom they would learn
That a savior was born in the night in a town
That was named Bethlehem – on the road two miles down.
The angels sang, "Glory in the highest to God!"
And their toes never touched the hard rocks or the sod
Where the shepherds and sheep were left slack-jawed and awed!

"Go to Bethlehem, now!" urged the angels on high
"For there you will find the world's savior whose cry
From a manger bed will be heard should you draw nigh,
To that place where he sleeps in the sweet by and by."

Then the sky filled with angels – an amazing array
Of heavenly figures and light bright as day
As their songs filled the night 'bout the baby who lay
In a Bethlehem stable in a manger of hay.
And before all the angels took leave and release
Of that star-speckled hillside with beasts clothed in fleece
They offered a last word – "To all the earth, peace!"

While the shepherds were dazzled, they'd not lost their wits
So they left all the sheep and in starts and in fits
Made their way to that town where the angels had said
The child might be found with a manger for bed,
The child who might ease all their angst and their dread
Of the bad in the world that had ached in their head.
For he, said the angels, was born to be king,
The Messiah of God, to ease all the sting
Of the pain in their lives but also to bring
About hope for the world – a marvelous thing!

And not long thereafter they arrived at the stable
Where Mary and Joseph with no changing table
Had made a rough nursery – as best they were able.
There the shepherds bent down on their knees with wide eyes
At this child whom the angels had praised from the skies
For the child looked no different, no grander, nor wise
Than their own boys and girls, their own gals and guys.

And perhaps that's the point of this child's holy coming
He comes just like us – no grand trumpets or drumming
No palace or castle to call his own home,
No princess or queen, no grand emperor of Rome
To cement his credentials as great king-in-waiting
No trappings of kingship, no crowds celebrating.
He comes as a child 'mong the last and the least
With a stable for home and for roommate a beast.

Yet savior is he, as the angels proclaimed
On the fields to the shepherds among sheep untamed.
So to Mary and Joseph shepherds told what they'd heard
In the night on the hillside while watching their herd
When angels arrived and sang songs 'bout their son
Who would be the world's savior when all's said and done.
And they glorified God as they left on the run
To return to their sheep 'fore the rising of sun.

That's what happened that night as best I recall
Though the details are muddled 'round events in the stall
And most people missed it, they slept through it all
Without e'en a clue about what some would call
The most wonderful thing that would ever befall
This world – you and I – short, medium, and tall.

What happened is God came among us that night
In a baby whose birth was for all a bright light
To dispel all the darkness of death and of sin
And to give us new hope to treasure within.

So lift up your voices and sing out with joy
Of the coming of God in the birth of a boy
Who is savior and king, the Christ and our Lord
A child born for me, born for you, now adored
By the world on this morning, this day of all days.
May God's peace be with you, today and always!

Merry Christmas! Amen