

The Christ Child Winked at Me!

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This year I'm celebrating Christmas for the 61st time. Of the first few times I remember nothing, but of many others I can recall memories instantly.

The Sunday school party was always a memorable event and I can clearly see its image in my mind. When the party began, the candles on the big Christmas tree and on the tables were lit, and the lights went out. Impressed by the beautiful glow of the candles and that special atmosphere, we experienced our Christmas party. We sang about the silent and holy night and listened respectfully to the Christmas Gospel. The resulting serene atmosphere evoked that special Christmas feeling.

As a child I was involved during the Christmas season in a very special form of theatre. Every year, the children of the Sunday school performed a play during the Christmas service and so I became an actor. Other children were chosen to play the parts of Joseph, Mary and the Wise Men. They were the real actors who were allowed to say something. However, those whom the youth worker thought it risky to allocate speaking parts to were cast as shepherds. I belonged to this category. To make it look as real as possible, I got given a tea-cozy to wear on my head, a sheet to wrap round me and I had to take off my shoes and socks. I still remember as if it were yesterday the time we staged the Christmas play *Where is the young child?* Invisible to the public, hidden behind the barn, was a youth worker, who seized my glasses just before the start of the performance, because he felt that they did not fit the image of a shepherd from the year zero. The curtain opened and the youth worker hissed at us to stand up, while the lights in the room were extinguished. I really could not see anything without my glasses, not even the Styrofoam star of Bethlehem.

I messed up the nativity scene miserably that year, because, making a lot of noise, I fell from the stage and distinguished myself by landing with a perfect belly flop between the flouncing members of the senior choir.

In the years following, I was the only shepherd to be put down beside the crib before the start of the play, being told not to move but only to watch. The child in the manger was a doll, whose eyes closed when it was laid down. Why, I don't know to this day, but one of the doll's eyes was closed and the other stayed open. That wink of the Infant Jesus I have always remembered.

When we sing 'His eye is on the sparrow, And I know he watches me', then I think of Isaiah 40. It tells us how big God really is. The writer says, among other things, that God can measure the heavens between his finger and thumb. Compared to him the nations are as a drop in a bucket, a speck on the scales. The universe is too small to

contain the greatness of God. When Isaiah comes face to face with this great God, the only thing he can grasp is that he's lost (Isaiah 5). No wonder, because the greatness of God is so immense, that we are people who cannot bear that greatness.

The large, moving miracle of Christmas is that the great God has made himself so small that we can see him. He has all his greatness laid down in one baby, giving us the chance to meet him.

Now, many Christmases later, I experience the mystery of God's coming to the world in a totally different way than before. No, the Christmas Gospel has not changed, but I am changed.

The life of a human being is always in motion; consequently there are constantly new questions about the meaning of life. Deep inside ourselves there is a cry for God's love and comfort in the sorrow of today and the fear of tomorrow.

Personally, I continue to wonder at the miracle that I cannot understand, but I still believe with all my heart. That unshakable faith I cannot explain, but it may well be that it started years ago when the Christ Child in a Christmas play winked at me once: 'I have come for you too...'

DjK