

A Christmas meditation

“Christmas is for children. Suffer the little children to take this burden from us.” So wrote Eric Sevareid some 45 years ago. Sevareid was one of the most articulate and insightful newspaper columnists and television commentators of the 20th century. He was a protégé of the distinguished broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow, yet he developed his own distinctive critical perspective and writing and speaking styles.

Sevareid understood the American way of Christmas. He sensed that we adults have dumbed it down and gussied it up. We don’t want the burden of a savior who was born poor and died poor; who focused on the neighbor in need rather than the family; who took women as seriously as men and began moving them toward equal responsibilities – not the dual responsibilities or the marginalization that many women in the world face today.

Christmas is not Good News until first the bad news has registered: remembrances of unsuccessful searches for meaning and fulfillment; recognitions of inhospitable habits with respect to neighbors near and far, and of prejudices concerning gender, race, and ethnicity; realizations of susceptibility to serious disease and of mortality. Then, and then only, comes the joy that the Twelve Days of Christmas herald: the great, deep, and abiding joy grounded in God’s incarnation among us and in God’s present acceptance and eventual restoration of us despite our failures, faults, and frailties. Will we have that joy during the whole season of Christmas? Or will we settle for the consolation prize of a superbly marketed yet fleeting merchandise-induced happiness on the 1st day of Christmas? Were we able once again to shift the burden of Christmas to the excited, wide-eyed, carol-singing, gift-engulfed children?

Let us pray:

Lord, we wonder as we wander out under the dark Christmas night sky. We wonder about the infant child in a feedbox. It almost seems as though you identify more with the poor masses than with the flourishing middle and upper classes. Could this be so? And why is the light shining in our darkness so small, so fragile, so vulnerable? Lord, we wonder as we wander. Amen.