

# BORN INTO THE ORDINARY

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Christmas is about God in the ordinary. After the birth of Christ, we need not look to the extraordinary, the spectacular, the miraculous to find God. God is now found where we live, in our kitchens, at our tables, in our wounds and in each others' faces.

That is hard to believe and always has been. When Jesus was on earth, virtually no one believed he was the Messiah precisely because he was so ordinary, so unlike what they'd imagined God to be.

People were looking for a Messiah. When finally Christ did appear, they were disappointed. They'd expected a superstar, a king, a miracle worker, someone who would, by miracle and hammer, vindicate good, destroy evil and turn the world rightfully upside down. Jesus didn't live up to those expectations. Born in a barn, preaching meekness and gentleness, unwilling to use power in a forceful way, there was little hammer and few miracles. Mainly, there was ordinariness.

It is curious that Scripture refuses to describe what Jesus looked like. It never tells us whether he was short or tall, with beard or without, had light or dark hair, or blue or brown eyes. Neither does it ever assign to him anything extraordinary in terms of psychological countenance: for example, it never tells us that when Jesus entered a room, his eyes were so penetrating and his gaze so awesome that people knew they were in the presence of something extraordinary.

No, Scripture doesn't describe him because, in terms of physical appearance, Jesus wasn't worth describing, he looked like everyone else. Even after the resurrection, he is mistaken for a gardener, a cook, a traveller. People had trouble recognizing

Jesus as God incarnate because he was so ordinary, so immersed in the things they took for granted. He was just a carpenter's son and he looked like everyone else.

Things haven't changed much in 2,000 years. Seldom does Christ meet expectations. We, like his contemporaries, are constantly looking beyond the ordinary, beyond the gardener, the cook, and the traveller, to try to find a miraculous Christ. It is for this reason that we fly to Fatima or Lourdes to see a spot where the Blessed Virgin might have cried and left us a message but fail to see the significance of tears shed at our own breakfast table. We are intrigued by Padre Pio who had the wounds of Christ in his hands, but fail to see the wounds of Christ in those suffering around us, or in our own emotional and moral wounds.

We pray for visions but seldom watch a sunset. We marvel at the gift of tongues, but are bored listening to babies. We desire proofs for the existence of God even as life in all its marvels continues all around us. We tend to look for God everywhere, except in the place where the incarnation took place – our flesh.

Several years ago, at a prayer seminar I was attending, a lady was giving a talk on Zen. She was describing how she spent more than two hours a day in meditation and how she would, through this practice, have very deep and lucid connections with the Transcendent. During the question period, I asked her how she would compare the feelings of God that she experienced during meditation with the feelings she had when she ate dinner with her family.

“No comparison,” she replied. “Eating dinner with my family can be a good experience, holy even in its own way. But the experience of God in meditation is much more real. The way God is experienced in meditation dwarfs everything else.”

My point here is not to question the value of meditation - nor indeed, the value of Lourdes, Fatima, or Padre Pio - but I am both Christian and pagan enough to know that hers is an answer that fails to account for Christmas. The God who was born on Christmas is more domestic than monastic..."God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him/her." Love is a thing that happens in ordinary places - in kitchens, at tables, on us when we abide there.

Christmas is a time to be born in a church, but it is also a time to be at home, among family, with loved ones, eating and drinking, abiding in the flesh - for that is what Christmas means. Through the incarnation, God crawls into ordinary life and invites us to meet Him there.

Merry Christmas!

RONALD ROLHEISER