

"What's That Tree Doing in the House?"

It was my son Evan's second Christmas when I brought a very large tree into our apartment. His eyes lit up as I dragged this monstrosity through the door. He remarked, "Why is Daddy bringing a tree into the house? Trees don't go inside!" The excitement and amazement will always stay in my mind. Christmas is an extraordinary time. We do things that are out of the norm because a miracle is about to occur . . . the Virgin is giving birth.

Much in the same way, as adults we question, 'How is it that a Virgin is giving birth?' It is a contradiction. This strange reality comes to us in the most joyous of ways - a child is being born that belongs to all of us - He is the Son of Man. God is breaking the rules of nature in order to grab our attention.

Childhood is something held close to our hearts. The children who surround us in Church on Sunday give testimony to an innocence that touches us all. The Christmas season ought to be a journey back to that innocence. The key to making this journey is found in discovering our innocence once again. A pure and joyous heart is a soul alive to the precious gift of life that comes to us from God. A child lives this joy naturally. As adults, we lose sight of the joy in life because we sometimes become distracted by the world and seek happiness from it instead of turning to God.

A news talk radio program had as its topic, 'Why are Americans unhappy and miserable people?' People bent on cynicism, complaining and always dwelling on the negative side of things have become common. It's because the contentment that the world promises is based upon an ego-centric premise that inevitably leads to sorrow. We occupy ourselves with activities which when practiced will lead to dissatisfaction unless there is something more to our life.

The something more has to be God if we are to discover the pearl of our Baptismal Grace. The moment we decide to change our orientation and live our lives completely for God, a door opens to the inner chamber of our soul where Christ longs to abide. Holy Scripture and Tradition tell us that we are created to be Temples of the Living God. Our hearts are to be set apart from the world and consecrated to Holiness. As a child's face lights up when extraordinary things happen, like a Father bringing a Christmas tree into the house; likewise, our souls experience New Life the minute we allow God to do something incredible with us.

My prayer for our Assumption family this Christmas is that our souls and hearts may become the soil of newness and rebirth. Collectively, let us not permit the world to make God jealous and may we offer up to God every sorrow, every unmet desire, every negative worry and allow Christ to fulfill that which the world cannot.

In Christ's love, Fr. Andrew Barakos