

## The Glorious Christmas Of Looney Love

### *Glorious Christmas*

Christmas can be a tough time for lots of folks. Often times, family dysfunction runs amuck during the *"American Holiday Season."* There is a sharp increase in depression, and even suicide. Much of this is borne forth from our worst enemy—our attitudes of self-absorption. Would you and your family like to experience a glorious Christmas? Would you like to escape the typical shallow encounter and instead enter the odd looniness of light shining outward from amidst the darkness? Then consider these 1600 year old words from Cyril of Alexandria about where such glory comes from, *"John the Evangelist calls the cross "Glory," so that you may learn when he says, "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39). It is clear that in this passage, 'glorified' means 'crucified'. Glory equals the cross. For if during His agony He willingly endured so much abuse by extending mercy, and accepted suffering voluntarily for our sake when it was in His power to avoid it, this acceptance of suffering for the good of others is a sign of extraordinary compassion and the highest glory. The glorification of the Son also took place in another way. Through His victory over death, we recognize Him to be THE Life, and Son of the Living God. The Father is glorified when He is shown to have such a Son begotten from Himself and with the same attributes as Himself. He is Goodness, Light, and Life; He is superior to death and whatever He wills, He brings about. When Jesus says 'Glorify Your Son' (John 17:1), He means, allow me to suffer in a voluntary way."* What God tells Paul, that *"His power is made perfect in weakness,"* just doesn't make sense to our fallen human sensibilities. It takes a HUGE leap of faith. But if you think about it for a few moments more, you begin to realize that the world's self-absorption is really what has failed most consistently, and that Christ's life of self-sacrifice, as crazy as it sounds, is the only thing from which there is actual resurrection.

### Foolishness to the Wise

St Paul essentially called it *'foolishness to the wise'* (1 Cor. 1:18-31). What do you think he was talking about? Have you ever considered how really foolish looking our Christmas is—the sheer madness in *the way God chooses* to show His love by lowering himself to become human? It's beautifully Looney Toons!

Check it out. There He is, the 2<sup>nd</sup> member of the Trinity, the Logos (the Word), the Son of the Most High God, the Creator, the one worthy of all worship, adored by the angels. He is not limited to any human language—which is tensioned between space and time (not to mention damaged by sin and misunderstanding), but instead He speaks the language of the Heavenly—a language of perfect love. It is a cushy job, loving and being loved by the other two members of the Trinity. It's the ultimate in comfort, sitting at the right hand of the Father. In short, it's absolutely divine!

...and here now, we pan to the Nativity of Emmanuel (God with us), the Word made into human flesh—in the baby, Jesus. He, who is larger than Life because He created it—the One immeasurably greater than the universe, now chooses to leave that ultimate comfort zone to enter a very cramped space—the tiny womb of a teenage girl. He, who is effortlessly enthroned upon pure Light, now chooses to begin His human existence through the bloody pain of childbirth as a dependent baby, enthroned now upon an animals' feeding trough in the poverty of a dark cave, amongst the stink that accompanies a barn. He who is the nurturer of every breath is now nurtured by the milk of his mother's breasts. He, who is the caregiver for the needs of the entire world, now becomes an infant who needs His diaper changed. He, who fashioned everything from the dust of the earth to the ins and outs of the human knee and even the intricacies of the tear duct, now chooses to become a stumbling child who falls upon rocky, dusty roads, skinning His knee, while the mother He created now kisses away His 'owies' and wipes away His tears to make it all better. He, who is the King of kings now chooses to enter a life on earth as the servant-King, by whom most men of power would feel their authority threatened—and thus respond with their own horrific attempts at harassing Him into compliance with their agendas. He, who has thousands of warring archangels at His command, and a myriad of battle-ready angels under their command, now willingly gives Himself over to a life that will end, not just in death, but a death that marks Him as a publicly convicted and ridiculed criminal, bearing upon Himself the worst that humanity has to offer. Yet, as St Paul highlights for us in Philippians 2:6, Christ's equality with God was NOT something that, in His suffering human form, He would look back on and say, "*I was robbed!*" In His compassion He willingly chose to come along side us, suffering with us in the midst of our worst pain. Wow! This is the crazy kind of love that trumps all of that stuff. That's Love, Folks!

### The Whimsical Lifeguard

The looniest thing of all is, this Divine Lifeguard who has come to save us is like no lifeguard we have ever seen. He is the whimsical Lifeguard who has the truly ridiculous idea of swimming out to us, lovingly taking us by our hand, and then drowning WITH us. He didn't come to save us from pain, but to go much further, employing that pain upon Himself to transform it into something beautiful, healing us from that which is far worse, death. Strangely, the Son of God took upon Himself, what most needed to be healed in the commonness of our humanity, in order to reconcile us to Life in our Creator.

Why would a God do a crazy thing like that? That's daft! It's just plain cuckoo! Why? Because it is the mystery of how crazy-in-love-with-us He is. It is a mysterious way of love that is foolishness to the so-called "*wise.*"

## Our Advent of Heavenly Absurdity

Now here WE are, in the Nativity Advent—our Fast of Preparation for Christ’s birth. But what is it exactly that we are preparing for? What is left to prepare? Wasn’t He already born 2000 years ago? So what exactly is it that we spend this period of preparation anticipating? Ha! Well here’s another rupture of bizarre fortune pouring out upon us. If, by focusing our attention, we prepare a place in our lives, if we clear a path for His coming amidst our everyday pursuits (as John the Baptist encouraged folks to do), then He continues being ever more born anew in our hearts. In this way, God’s life-giving Love can be born in our flesh too, in the dark places that we encounter, amidst the stinky places of the world—so that we too, as God’s children, get to participate in His loony mission to humanity. Regarding these kinds of encounters, there is a great quote by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and religious mystic, Simone Weil. She observed, *“The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural use for it.”* Our suffering becomes a means to demonstrate to others the kind of trust we have in God, the kind of love that we have for Him and for them, thus maturing us in the likeness of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. In this way, our focused participation in the advent of Jesus’ Nativity is an active participation in and fulfillment of what St Athanasius said about the Incarnation of Christ, *“God became human, so that humanity could become God”* (not becoming God in His nature of course, but by the mystery of His grace as radical participants in the powerful energy of His unconditional Love).

## The Glory of Christmas Fundamentalism

Once He is borne in our hearts, this baby king demands much from us— *“mercy for our neighbors.”* There it is folks—the foundation, the cornerstone, the only rock upon which anything we build will survive. For us, radical Orthodoxy is really nothing more than crazy, irrational, nonsensical, Looney Toons, radical LOVE for God and for His beloved creation. It is the only fundamental whose fundamentalism becomes a beautiful thing. It is the kind of love that’s willing to sacrifice itself not only for those who love us back, but also especially for those who consider us as their enemy. Hmm...revisiting St Cyril’s words at the beginning, *“The Father is glorified when He is shown to have such a Son begotten from Himself and with the same attributes as Himself.”* So if we, as God’s children, wish to dispense with the shallow holidays and instead have a glorious Christmas, then it behooves us to participate in Christ’s insane, self-sacrificial attributes of love toward our surrounding community. It’s the looniness of being born, wrapped in swaddling clothes—a burial shroud. THAT kind of craziness is what brings us to a glorious Christmas. *“Now send Your servant, Lord, according to Your Word, in peace, because my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all the peoples, a light to the enlighten the surrounding nations, and the glory of Your people Israel.”*