

Even Unto Bethlehem

Christmas 2013, Rob Giesemann

The **Bad News** is – some people here [tonight] feel the malady of an empty existence. You are in pain, or perhaps feel *altogether* disconnected; and you feel no pain at all. The malady of an empty existence. The **Good News** is – *especially* unto you – *Unto you a child is born, Unto you, a Son is given.*

*** I camped at Big Sur four years ago, on a lonely perch overlooking the Pacific. The sky was clear, the stars brighter than I've seen anywhere, save Africa. That night as I stared into the infinite black, a shooting star flew close above my head, perhaps as low as a hundred feet. This meteorite was *not* some far-off prick of light, but large, like a burning football. It flew out over the Pacific, and I listened, to hear the splash, it seemed so close. Nights like *that* night make me feel like I can pluck a star literally out of the sky, and hold it in my hand... In my hand, alive with reds and blues, and the glitter of silver – *Imagine* – holding a star in your hand.

*The ancient Greeks pondered the infinite nature of the nighttime sky. Does it extend forever? Or is it *finite*? Does it have boundaries, like the ocean? If space is indeed bounded, the Greeks pondered, what would happen if you were to stick your hand through the boundary – what would your hand *feel*?

In 1929, Edwin Hubble, working at the Carnegie Observatories in Pasadena, measured what are called the *redshifts* of distant galaxies – Light traveling from these far-away galaxies appears to bend. Hubble concluded that the bending light means the universe is actually expanding, the galaxies are moving outward; the bent light discloses their historic trajectory.

This expanding universe theory led to the Big Bang Theory – That the universe was created by an explosion that thrust, *and continues to thrust*, all matter outward. The birth of the universe, - and compare that to the birth of the Christ child, when the universe of God likewise exploded, *and continues to propel*, spirit and life and grace outward. Shepherds abiding in the fields, watching their flocks by night, and an explosion of light washed across field and flocks as this baby was born. The apostle John later named the child, *the light of men*. This light washed the shepherds, compelling them *to see* – and you *see* the connection between light and vision – *See* this thing which is come to pass. And you are here tonight, likewise invited to see.

**The Big Bang Theory didn't answer the Greek question about the finite nature of the universe. More recently, however, physicists have suggested that not only is there some infinite nature to the universe, this infinity is layered. There literally exists right here – not out there at the edge of space – but in this immediate physical location – up to 40 actual universes, simultaneously existing, side by side. You may not be able to thrust your hand through to the universe next-door, but, they say, it is possible for types of matter to pass between universes – like air passing through a screen door. Infinite universes, and suddenly, infinity is no longer about the distant nighttime sky, but about the obverse – the infinitesimal. The smallness – multiple universes right here, between your fingertips. The boundary of the universe is at your fingertips.

Perhaps the Child born in the stable was infused with grace from some other universe, grace passing like air through a screen door. And isn't *that* the hope of Christmas – that we are not nihilistically **alone** in an empty universe, but that grace – tangible hope – for you, here, now, flows into life, into your life? Like air passing through a screen door? And at that moment in the birth story of Jesus, some football-sized shooting star from a universe *this close*, split atoms in the heavens and flew immediately overhead – Indeed, these matters of universes and skies and nebulae and galaxies and expanding universes are the wondrous things ordinary shepherds felt, but could not articulate, ... all this, while Mary was birthing a baby a stable in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem of Judea, while Cyrenius was governor of Syria, in this infinitesimally small corner of the Roman world.

Madeline L'Engle, the late author of the Newbery award-winning children's book, A Wrinkle in Time, once told a story about her own childhood. She was perhaps five, and spending Christmas at her grandmother's house in Florida. She was outside, one night, and the rural Florida sky was that expansive black of 180 degrees. Before this night, Madeline still believed the entire universe was made-up of her safe world, only that which she could see, . . .that which she could touch. But on this night, at this moment, as she stared into that black expanse, she realized just how artificial her small world really was. *[Suddenly] I saw creation bursting the bounds of daily restriction, and stretching out from **dimension to dimension, beyond ... comprehension....* Bursting the bounds of daily restriction – And so few people burst the bounds of daily restriction. So few people grasp the infinite nature of both God and life, that life does not consist only of what can be seen and touched.

Life and by extension, God, are expansive like the universe...Exploding outward...Always creating, always redeeming, replete with hope and dimension. Forty-plus universes existing simultaneously – simply because it cannot be otherwise. And I have to ask, is your life likewise expansive? Transcending dimension? Do you see God as redemptive – and life full of hope? Or do you endure the malady of an *empty existence*?

In The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, that humorous story of a rough and ready group of kids participating in an otherwise staid church Christmas pageant – Gladys, the angel – the only one with a speaking line – shouts- literally shouts – at the shepherds, Hey! Unto you a child is born. And that, you see, is the whole story: Hey – unto **you** a child is born. Wake up! Universal walls have cracked and grace and light are intruding. The only correct response?... Come, let us go *even unto Bethlehem* and see this thing which is come to pass.