



December 5, 2018

*feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isaiah 40:11)*

Greetings! (This is not Gabriell!)

As I often do in the Christmas season for some reason, I crave a 'Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' immersion, and it's not just explained by having nine grandkids around. I rarely watch movies on plane flights, but flying out of India a few days ago, and heading for Istanbul, I noticed that the movie version of the Lewis Narnia tale was available in Turkish Airlines' classic movies selection. Of course I watched it, again – and I couldn't have cared less about the criticism and complaint that the movie attracted when it first came out.

The sounds, the scents, the touches were all there and they were as evocative as ever: the smell of Aslan's incensed breath in the air, the hissing of Mr. Beaver's freshly caught fish in the frying pan, the glug of Mrs. Beaver's marmalade roll. Above all, there are the inexplicable feelings that come when it is said that Aslan is on the move. But what has all this got to do with the Christmas story, you might ask? Didn't Aslan say, "I shall be glad of your company tonight ... stop when I tell you, and after that leave me to go on alone." Isn't the story less about Bethlehem and more about Gethsemane? "'Fool!' said the witch. 'He knows that unless I have blood as the law says, all Narnia will be overturned and perish in fire and water.'" "They began to drag the bound and muzzled lion to the Stone table." Isn't it about crucifixion? Isn't it less about the incarnation and more about the atonement? "The Stone Table was broken into two pieces ... and there was no Aslan." Isn't it about resurrection? Doesn't it fit an Easter meditation better than an Advent one?

I am looking for a wardrobe door into the story of Christ's birth. Allow me to slip through the furs with Lucy into the place that was "always winter and never Christmas." That is a perfect image for the historical and personal terrain that we in fact encounter in the gospel narratives. The White Witch's wolves were no less than the Roman legions that ground their heel into the Jewish spirit, and her murderous megalomania was no less than Herod's. The despair of the beavers was earthed in Elizabeth's womb and the hopelessness of the fauns was mouthed in Zechariah's unexpectant prayers. The Narnians' longings for Aslan were more than matched by the desperation of messianic hope that had languished in dumbness and darkness for over 400 years. Isaiah described Narnia well: "gloom ... distress ... people walking in darkness ... living in the land of the shadow of death ... the warrior's boot ... the oppressor's rod" (8:22 – 9:5). Faith was frozen with no thaw in sight. The land of Israel was Narnian. So where does Lucy come in?

You have only been reading the story one minute when Lucy says, "What's that noise?" In another reading-minute, she is alone in a room that had nothing in it except one big wardrobe and a dead blue-bottle on the window sill. It is Lucy who first stumbles into Narnia. She "felt a little frightened, but she felt very inquisitive and excited as well." Surely you are thinking about all the similarities of Mary's experience, especially as her story also begins with a fearful question of the "What was that?" kind. "Mary was greatly troubled at his words." (Luke 1:29) And did she not also feel a palpable presence? It is Lucy who bears the shame and reproach of not being believed. "The others who thought she was telling a lie, and a silly lie too, made her very unhappy." And what of the responses to Mary's possible explanations about her pregnancy? It is Lucy who first discerns the nature of Aslan and discerns the relationship between his awesome power and gentle grace: "Terrible paws, thought Lucy, if he didn't know how to velvet them." And was Mary

not the first to be told the nature of Jesus, that He was the Son of the Most High, the Son of David, the Son of God? It is Lucy who first expresses “a horrible feeling as if something were hanging over us ... either something dreadful that is going to happen to him or something dreadful that he is going to do.” And was Mary not told that a sword would pierce her own soul? Lucy watches afar off, weeping as Aslan is mocked and jeered, as Mary was one of the women who were “watching from a distance” (Matthew 27:56). It is Lucy who scrambles to be the first to reach and touch the leaping back-to-life Aslan. “Oh, you’re real, you’re real! Oh Aslan!” I do believe that Lewis modeled Lucy on Mary.

Lewis presents Lucy with this capacity to recognize and receive revelation, as Mary is presented with this spiritual capacity to ponder things in her heart. It is Lewis who mirrors the birth narratives in the receptivity of women to what one commentator has described as “the approaches of mystery and glory.” When Mrs. Beaver stops what she’s doing and stands up and shouts, “So you’ve come at last,” we have to feel that she would have fitted just fine into the pre-natal class at Elizabeth’s house. And when she exclaims, “At last! I never thought I’d live to see this day,” we would not be wrong to think of Anna. Indeed, all we have mentioned of Lucy suggests that it is understandable to discern in her an analogous presentation of the spiritual DNA of another young girl, also in a frigid Narnian landscape – none other than Mary, the mother of Jesus. If Lucy in this fairy-tale leads the other characters in the way to approach and respond to the coming of Aslan, then more so does Mary in the original draft of the faith-tale, in the way to approach and respond to coming divinity, to the gift of revelation and salvation, to the wooing of God, to the brooding of the Holy Spirit. “Be it unto me according to your Word.” On the first Sunday of Advent, I suggested that you could do yourself a favor by following her for the next four weeks and meditating on her journey – her responses and words and actions. May it be unto you according to His Word this Advent.

Advent blessings!

Stuart