

O Holy Night – Advent, part 1

1. Some of our best and worst theology is presented in songs. In the “best” category is the song we are going to use to work our way deeper into Advent. First, let’s remind ourselves of the lines in the first verse: [ONE]
2. Let’s first open ourselves up to the word “holy” and all it entails. I’m not sure how far back we would have to go to see the human tendency to coarsen and sully every good thing, but I would imagine it started very soon after Adam and Eve. In terms of holiness, it would seem humans have a lot in common with crabs...[TWO]
3. I saw this in action back in the late 80s when Kami and I moved from Scotland to Ohio. We lived on the edge of Appalachia and, one day, a school on the other side of that line asked if I would come down and give a talk to a group of young women there. These were all young girls who were pregnant or who had already had a child. The school wanted to help motivate them to stay in school. (two weeks, the second week the others had pulled the one back down)
4. We fear that, if one shines, they show our weaknesses, scars, and failures so we have to tear them down. If one is rejoicing, we have to bring up our pain (“wouldn’t want to pay the taxes”, models, rich). We then weaponize our differences.
5. Why are people like this? Why do people shout at each other online, in traffic, and in our Senate and House chambers? Perhaps they do not understand what the song says next. [THREE]
6. What are people worth? There is a concept in sociology and psychology called “utility potential.” People tend to form friendships based on what that friendship can do for them, especially when they are in their teens. Most of us grow out of this but some never will.
7. And when we grow out of it, it is because of affection and points of commonality; not because we suddenly had a realization that people are worth more than what they can do for us. And so, we don’t spend much time reflecting on **the preciousness of others**.

8. We spent months looking at Thin Places so we should have an idea of the holy and what holiness means. True, in many ways, our biology and appearance show a commonality with the animal kingdom. God found elegant solutions to some problems we share with the animals such as blood flow, locomotion, vision but we are different according to an ancient story. [FIVE]
9. This is not the only difference between our value and that of animals. God has tried and tried to impress on us our value. He promised us that He would one day show us exactly how valuable, how wonderful we are to Him. So – He sent His Son. In Isaiah 53, He tells us exactly how this is going to work.
 - a. Vv. 1-3. He was like us, in a world that tore others apart, denigrated them, refused to assign them any value. Jesus was sent into a world filled with tribes whose own names for themselves are most often translated “the people.” No others were valued.
 - b. Vv. 4-9. Jesus would pay the ultimate price for us.
 - c. Vv. 10-12. Jesus will then be restored to his rightful position.
10. Paul would say essentially the same thing in different words in Philippians 2.
11. We can be forgiven for asking a very important question here: is God an idiot? Why would He overpay for us? And buy SO much? Jesus told us why. First, our value is more than we know. [SIX] Second, it’s all about love. [SEVEN]
12. Love drives us to have children. It drives us to marry and stay together through thick and thin...or thin and thin! And, as we’ve learned from countless shows about pawn shops, cars, houses, and antique roadshows – something is worth what someone will pay for it.
13. No, God is not an idiot; we are. We are the ones who don’t understand the value of every person, including our own value. If we understood it, perhaps we would not sell ourselves so cheaply, settling for sex when we want love, settling for noise when we want companionship and joy, settling for presents when we really want

presence. We live in a universe where someone has switched around all the price tags...and it has broken us.

14. So, when Jesus appears and the soul feels its worth, it changes everything. [EIGHT]
15. Now, we look at everything and everyone differently. [NINE] Everything changes when you know the value of everything. Racism disappears. Crime stops. Heaven breaks into the present.
16. How many of us would love to go back and spend more time with our children and spend less on them? How many of us wish we had more time with a parent or a spouse? How many of us wish we'd studied harder in school or tried harder to learn a sport or language or instrument, etc? We didn't realize the value of the moment and, so, it got away from us.
17. How would knowing the value of everything change our past and, thereby, change our present? Then let us start now to realize that what God says about us and what God paid for us is realistic and right.
18. Truly it was a holy night [TEN], a night that changed everything.

This is your cause, your assignment, and your holy mission:

View others as precious. The preciousness of others is a phrase you should repeat to yourself several times a day. The world wants you to be a crab. Be holy.

Value the moment, value presence, value the holiness of the life given to you and to all of us by dent of the love of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

[ELEVEN]