

December 13, 2020, the Third Sunday of Advent (Year B)
Heer's Jesus!

Luke 1:46b-55

^{46b} My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is His name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear Him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel,
in remembrance of His mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise He made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to His descendants forever.”

Gaudete! Rejoice! What could we possibly have to rejoice over? Well, there are others who are far worse off than we. This skates close to what the Germans call “schadenfreude,” taking pleasure in the misfortune of others. Besides, someone near and dear to me says that people suggesting others were worse off when she was recovering from multiple injuries requiring extensive orthopedic surgery provided no comfort whatsoever. Confronted with the suffering of others, you frequently don't know what to say. Say nothing; be present. Tough times are unique to their owners. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.

That is nobody knows, but Jesus. I think it was an Isaac Bashevis Singer character, a Holocaust survivor, who said, “I awake in awe. I go to sleep in awe.” Before encountering that passage I thought of awe as a deliriously happy feeling. Now it seems closer to ecstasy. Ecstasy means to be out of yourself and awe means to be undone by

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what you are confronting. That's why so many people have spiritual reactions to nature. Standing before Niagara Falls puts a human in her place. Gazing on one of those bears everyone around here talks about should put a human in his place. Certainly the eagles in these skies inspire awe. They are big and they are dangerous. There is an element of fear in these experiences and according to Proverbs 9: 10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

But Christmas is about a baby, right? Babies are cute and cuddly to most of us. "Aw she looks like her grandfather, a bald sour puss." Something happens when someone hands you the baby saying, "Here, hold this." In your hands is the front end of a life. It's like holding an elephant's tail when the rest of the creature is standing behind you. The feeling is compounded when a nurse or midwife hands you the baby saying, "Here, this is yours." That's when the little bundle gets awesome! From now on you will have to name it; change it; feed it; give it the talk about birds and bees; wait for it to call; hand it off to someone else's kid or let it go alone into the world. What kind of life stretches ahead for this little thing? If all goes as it should our children are a bit like astronauts who go off into worlds we will never see missing us when we are gone. Even if you don't have children, all children are our children. How we treat and care for them will echo into the future far further than all your other accomplishments.

In the heart of Mary, all this nestled along with the child she named Jesus. Imagine: it wasn't the nurse that handed him to her, but God. Here, take this baby and take care of it. Someday it will save the world. That's a life path far bigger than the elephant behind you. Ed McMahan, God rest him, introduced Johnny Carson every weeknight for thirty years. Jack Nicholson did it once in *the Shining*. We knew what to

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expect on the Tonight show, and Steven King left us clues about what to expect from Jack. There were a lot of clues about what to expect from Jesus, but people missed them. He was predicted without being predictable. Even Mary had just a vague notion about that baby she bore in Bethlehem.

Some children achieve great things, and others turn out to be big disappointments. Jesus fell into the latter category. Wonderful stuff was predicted for this favored child of God. Crowns, wealth, restoration of fortune, vengeance were all things the world expected of him. That little baby had so much laid on him. He failed on all counts. His family tried to stage an intervention and he disowned them: ^{Mark 3:31} "Then *Jesus'* mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' ³³ And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.' "

One thing to remember: we may have given up on him, but he never gave up on us. Jesus grew not to fulfill our expectations, but to fill our needs. There are times I wish he had been different, said different things; approved my selfish fears, but no. The baby became awesome enough to save us. Each year we get to say, "Here's Jesus."

Concluding Prayer from Patrick of Ireland, "Christ be with us, Christ within us, Christ behind us, Christ before us, Christ beside us, Christ to win us, Christ to comfort and restore us, Christ beneath us, Christ above us, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love us, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger."