

**Dancing With the Divine Child**  
**Larry Reimer**  
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**SCRIPTURE – Isaiah 11:1-9**

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
The calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
And a little child shall lead them.*

**Choir Anthem – “Creation Will Be At Peace”**

Notice how much more this scripture passage from Isaiah resounds in your heart when it is sung than when it is read. I think most of us know of these words from Isaiah **in** our hearts even if we don't exactly know them **by** heart.

Rationally, these words make little sense. “The lion shall eat straw like an ox?” Well, a lion, no matter how evolved, will never become a vegetarian. And as David Reiser was very fond of quoting Woody Allen, “The wolf may lie down with the lamb, but the lamb will not get a lot of sleep.”

The image is tied together with the final improbability – a little child shall lead.

The rational brain knows that every line of this scripture is improbable. And yet, when we hear the choir sing, “The wolf will lie down with the lamb. The cow and bear will feed. Their young will play together. A little child will lead them all. In the holy mountain of the Lord, creation will be at peace,” yes when we hear that sung, God's grace breaks through our rational resistance and allows us to hope. We dream of the peaceable kingdom, a world without war, and we illustrate it on our Christmas cards with a picture of a lion and a lamb.

How is this impossible ideal relevant to our world, when on Friday, November 28, at 5:00 a.m. at the Wal-Mart in Valley Stream, Long Island, Jdimytai Damour of Queens, New York, was trampled to death by shoppers charging in to the store for its bargains?

What amazes me about the Associated Press description of this incident, is that after the account of the trampling which included the injuring of other workers who tried to rescue Mr. Damour and the anger of shoppers after they were told they had to leave the store because of the death, the article goes on the list the prices of the sale items, as if this were somehow relevant.

I have a long standing practice of not attacking commercialism in my Advent sermons. Sermon shots at commercialism are too easy. They're trite. Typically, they offer no new insight. But just to be sure, I looked up the ten Advent and Christmas sermons included in our new book, [The Long Winding Journey Home](#), (available locally UCG this

morning, Goering's book store, and through all major on-line retailers, a perfect Christmas present for friends and family), yes where was I? Commercialism. I checked on the ten Advent and Christmas sermons included therein and found that none of them took shots at commercialism.

However, I mention this year's Wal-Mart incident because it stands out as a new symbol of our time. It's an exception for sure, not a nationwide trend. But it was committed not by an individual, but by a crowd that became a mob. Is the economy so bad that the hope of owning a Samsung 10.2 megapixel digital camera for \$69 turned otherwise good and reasonable people into an uncontrollable, obsessed mob?

How do we re discover the power of the holy season of Advent and Christmas to re direct the sale-frenzied greed back to the originally good desire to be generous with one another?

We want, I believe, to simply be happy and make others happy at Christmas. What makes us happy? The research of Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania shows that happiness is enhanced by connections with other people, optimism, religious faith, acts of generosity, community service, and work and hobbies that engage our hearts and minds. While the word happiness is rooted in the word "happenstance" suggesting it is random luck, it is also true that by seeking out joy, living fully, and appreciating the world around us, we can reach out for happiness. (From "Holding on to Happiness in Hard Times", The Week, December 5, 2008 – no author listed)

This brings me to where I began, the peaceable kingdom, where the lion lies down with the lamb, shoppers don't trample Wal-Mart clerks, and war ends. One way Christmas seeks to counter war and greed is through the archetype of the divine child, embedded deep in each human soul.

The divine child is described by the psychologist Carl Jung, along with other archetypes such as the warrior, magician, queen, and maiden. An archetype is a quality of human nature virtually all of us can recognize in ourselves and each other. Archetypes turn up in dreams, literature, and myths. Archetypes are part of our collective unconscious, the universal soul, hardwired in our DNA as powerfully as the swallow's urge to migrate. The divine child is the archetype of that renewing force that leads us toward wholeness.

The divine child is symbolized at Christmas in that child energy that awakens at the crack of dawn with nothing but hope and excitement. Can you remember that feeling on the best of all Christmas mornings? Can you remember that energy, waking up on the first day of summer saying, "Wow, I can do anything today."?

That's your own divine child. We're all born with it. If we're lucky, our parents help us nurture it, guiding us around our own sense of delusional grandiosity to a path toward realistic greatness. If we're lucky,

our parents show us we are valued and loved unconditionally. If we're lucky, our parents want us to know that we shine.

The hard knocks of life thwart the divine child in each of us. We experience evil. We encounter betrayal. We hear of another day of war, and our faces fall, our hearts break, and our divine spark flickers. We protect ourselves by scaling down our hopes so we won't be disappointed again. Our rational side reads this ancient scriptural text from Isaiah, the wolf shall lie down with the lamb – a little child shall lead them - at best files it away as a nice piece of poetry, at worst dismisses it as ridiculous.

Yet the light of that divine child still shines deep down in our souls. As the gospel of John says, darkness can never overpower it. To spring back to life the divine child must be incarnated, made flesh, reborn. There are many ways that the divine child is brought to life. Christmas embodies the shining of the light of God by gathering in the images of the divine child, such as this passage from Isaiah that we read and sang this morning.

Here's how I think the Divine Child is incarnated, made flesh in you and in me.

First, deep down, we sense our holiness. The first chapter of Genesis says we are created in the image of God. There is an African greeting which affirms this: "May the God in me greet the God in you."

Sandy said so beautifully a few weeks ago that the community of the church is a container for our grief. Today we recognize that it is also the container for our light, for our divinity, for all our hopes of what the world might be. It is a place for the divine child to come to life in us.

Second, the divine child appears over and over again in stories of birth. In Roots, Alex Haley retells the story of the birth of his ancestor Kunta Kinte in 1750 in Gambia, West Africa. In a beautiful naming ceremony eight days after his birth, Kunta Kinte's father holds him up under the stars, recounting all his ancestors who have gone before and affirming the promises this child brings to the world.

You may remember the same archetype in the opening scene of Lion King, when the new born lion Simba is held before the sunrise by his father Mufasa as a promise of a new generation.

In Christianity, the divine child comes to life in the magic of the Christmas birth story. It's simple and short. It contains those components of heaven and light in stars and angels, the connection with the earth in a stable among the animals, a bond with the common people in the shepherds, a link with royalty with the Magi, and a reflection of sacred history with Bethlehem the city of David. But mostly it's about two people having a baby. It's simply that story of birth that is like any and all births, yours, mine, our children.

Third, when our children are born, there is a moment I believe when we glimpse the divine child in its pure form. The poet Wordsworth believed that we come straight from heaven, "Our birth is but a sleep and

a forgetting...Not in entire forgetfulness and not in utter nakedness (are we born) but trailing clouds of glory from God who is our home..." One of the joys that Sandy, Andy and I have in our ministries is to be able to visit new parents soon after their children are born and pray over these new children for all the hopes that rise in their birth.

I think that one of the reasons we who are grandparents carry on so about our grandchildren is that in our older age, less confined to the day to day tasks of actually raising these children, we are so deeply touched with this chance to see that spark of the divine child shining again, even more brightly for us.

I think this image of the divine child is why, in its own roundabout way, the Christmas elf is such a hit here. That elf has archetypal stuff. It touches the magical wonder of the child and releases some of the divine child energy.

The fourth way we discover the divine child is through dreams. In 1992, while on sabbatical, Sandy had a dream of a beautiful little girl with strawberry blonde hair inviting Sandy out on to the front lawn of our house back in Suburban Heights to dance. The little girl took Sandy's hands and they danced and danced. Sandy said it was a wonderfully energizing experience. At the time and Sandy was in a dream class with Jeremy Taylor, who has led workshops here at UCG a few times. Jeremy introduced Sandy to the archetype of the divine child who calls forth our light and hope. Jeremy said it was noteworthy that little girl invited Sandy to dance in the front yard. He said he would interpret that dream to mean that she was called to become more public with her spirituality and leadership. Which is exactly what Sandy has been doing since then.

Listen to dreams like that and watch for them in your own life

I believe that one of the reasons we are so easily sidetracked into the commercialism of Christmas, is that we mistakenly feed the archetype of the needy, dependent, or wounded child rather than the divine child at Christmas. Besides that divine spark in our souls, we also have the wounds of childhood we seek to heal in ourselves, the heavy feeling that is always seeking to replace something lost in childhood. We try to fill that need with things, for ourselves and for our children. And typically we are never clear about what will fill that need and nothing is ever enough.

Instead remember the divine child, which has the qualities of light, wisdom, and a mission of healing and redemption. The divine child is the light of God within us.

Matthew Fox says that the church makes a mistake when it calls Jesus the only son of God. Every one of us who uncovers this wisdom, this light, this willingness to care for the goodness and peace of the world is truly a son or daughter of God. That's why the divine child invites us to the dance in our dreams. That is why the real children around us remind us that wisdom is found in the playful amazement of childhood.

When Isaiah says a little child will lead all to the peaceable kingdom, he is telling us to look for that divine child power in others and in ourselves to find hope. Therefore let us always listen for visions of hope and peace, like Isaiah's, and let us forever be ready for the child who will lead us there, a child waiting again to be born this Christmas in each of us.

Let us read together the poem by Eileen Spinelli from this morning's bulletin,

The children dressed in paper gowns,  
Crumpled halos, clattering coat hanger wings,  
Teach us so many wise and tender things,  
Teach us most that we are all of us angels  
Trembling against poster-painted skies,  
All of us more beautiful  
More capable of peace than we realize,  
All of us starry and full of zany song.  
Come to the cardboard inn, come with the children.  
There is room now!  
Yes, it is Christmas and there is room!

*(Eileen Spinelli, "Christmas Pageant" in Advent Reflections 2008,  
Sandy Reimer, ed.)*

Prayer –

O God may I catch the vision again, of your holy mountain, where the warring enemies in my life can finally give it up, and the holy beautiful child may come forward and say, "It's all good. It's all good."  
I pray that I may find in the darkness, that source of light, give it air, let it shine, and in so doing find the joy and calm I want and need.  
Lift O God those weights that cling to me,  
Help me cast off the fears of the dark,  
And open me to the joy of a child on Christmas morning, with my family, with my friends, and with my world. Open me to joy.

Step softly again into this wounded world O God.  
Embrace it in your love.  
Bring light to broken lives,  
Warmth into frozen hearts,  
Hope to those at war.  
May your joy flow through every place.  
Amen.