

Every year, when this time of year rolls back around...and after all the busyness...*we can still be surprised by Christmas.*

We can be surprised...that Christmas still...can have an uncanny *power*. And, it can still happen to us...when we least expect it. *Christmas can have the power...to find us... and awaken us...to God.*

It can be hard to even talk about it. Which is why people have so often, throughout history, turned to music and art...candlelight and Christmas tree lights...*and stories*. JRR Tolkien--the British writer, Oxford professor of ancient languages and ancient stories, and a Christian—he recognized the human need to find a way to speak of such mysterious things...when he wrote an essay in 1947 on the power and potential of what he called “fairy-stories”. Here is a little bit of what he said (1):

**The consolation of fairy-stories...is not essentially “escapist”...
In its fairy-tale setting, the sudden appearance of an unimaginable consolation...is a grace...
The consolation does not deny the existence of...sorrow...and failure...
Instead, such a fairy-tale consolation denies...in the face of much evidence...universal final defeat...
And gives us a fleeting glimpse of Joy...Joy beyond the walls of the world...yet a gift to this world...a
Joy that is as poignant as grief. (p. 33)**

And then Tolkien goes on to speak more specifically of Christmas:

**The Gospels contain a kind of fairy-story...
But this is a story that--unlike any other fairy-story--has actually entered into our history...and become
in some ways...real...
The Birth of Christ is...like a fairy-story...by its sudden turn of events...toward an unexpected joy...
The Resurrection is another such story...
This story of Christ...both begins...and ends...in unimaginable joy...
There is no tale ever told...that we would rather find was true...than the Nativity...and the
Resurrection...of Christ...
And it has come to us right within our world history...within the reign of the Caesars...forever stirring
our imagination...despite ourselves...and provoking us...with the prospect of the consolation of
unexpected joy...and even the ultimate redemption of the world. (p.35)**

Every time I return to these words of Tolkien...they help me remember again...why I still love the nativity story of Jesus’ birth...and the stories of his resurrection. And I realize again that these Gospel stories...have the *shimmer* of fairy tales...not because they are simply “made-up” for our inspiration...but because they seek to point to something that is so true and so wonderful...that it exceeds the ability of ordinary language to tell.

And so, we hear today of a time...when within this weary world...when a child was born...and angels heralded his birth...and ...despite the familiar grim and gloomy tales...of the histories of our own making...there was this sudden appearance in Christ...of an unimaginable consolation...of an ultimate hope.

May we yet...still...be surprised by Christmas...and experience...its power...to find us...and awaken us...to God.

Merry Christmas!

(1) This is my interpretative quote. For the full text see: <https://coolcalvary.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/on-fairy-stories1.pdf>;