

## Daniel's reflection for week beginning 25th December Paradox in a manger

A Native American warrior was rushing through the forest. He saw a fallen egg and placed it in the first nest he came across. He had placed an eagle's egg in a prairie hen's nest! One day when the hatched chickens were busy doing what a prairie-bird family does best – hopping, pecking, squeaking – a magnificent eagle swooped across the sky. The young eagle was filled with a sudden, aching longing.

Immediately reprimanded by the mother hen for time-wasting and day-dreaming, the growing eagle-in-disguise dutifully continued to scratch the dry earth. But, the story goes, no matter what suspicion, ridicule or indoctrination the prairie chicken continued to endure from that day on, she could never forget that moment when her heart in hiding stirred deeply and briefly in sublime wonder and recognition of some inexpressible and beautiful recognition.

As we stand around the crib, something stirs inside us. We look at the baby who will soon endure the delights and the vicissitudes of being truly human, who will later writhe in a darkness from which a great light will shine. We look at the baby and stir to an echo of heaven in ourselves.

The small child is a sign of contradiction; paradox in a manger. To be God and to be human, to be beyond and to be within, to be the future and the not-yet. There is tension, conflict and pain in this graced glimpse of possibility. Like Jesus did, we carry a holy disturbance within us from birth to death. The infant holds the fullness of divine love in its finite presence and infinite promise. We kneel near the baby and an awareness of our undreamt-of destiny awakens in us. We sense a beckoning horizon as yet invisible and uncertain. We are like people trying to remember the dream from which we have just awoken. . . .

The Christmas stories and hymns are told and sung to remind us of who we are and who we are called to be. They are as much about us as they are about God. And we need to hear them. Otherwise we forget. . .

Christmas disturbs adults with profound dilemmas for the soul. How do we resolve the tension between the real and the really real, that call from another place to be answered in this place? Are we open to sacrificing what we are, for what we may become? These quiet questions, all too easily stifled in the frantic lists of Christmas expectation, still carry, for the open soul, a disturbing persistence.

And all the time it is true to say that without that restless spirit, that unsatisfied longing, our desire for God would die. It is yet another dimension of the paradox of faith. The space must be kept empty. Why? Because it is the space for wonder, for possibility, for reaching beyond our grasp; it is the silence without which, in a world of noise, we would never hear the small song within us that captivates our hearts. It is the dark space from which the memory and presence of another truth will slowly rise, like the morning star, to restore the light.

*(Unmasking God pp 118, 119.120)*