

The Divine Intruder
Luke 2:1-20
December 24, 2007

This month a major project has been accomplished at the parsonage, the house belonging to the church where the pastor resides. The garage floor, driveway, front walkway and porch were all torn up and replaced with new concrete. While the concrete was drying, the major entrances to the house, including the front door and the garage door, were not usable. We went in and out through the sliding glass doors in the back. I had never before had reason to care that sliding glass doors do not lock from the outside, only from the inside. Fortunately since we live in a safe community, we were not too bothered to leave the door unlocked during the day when we were at school or work. However, one evening we went to Town Hall Theater, just one block away, and realized that the door would be unlocked in the dark of night. While we still felt generally safe, there was a moment of anxiety as we recognized that we were vulnerable to an unwelcome intrusion. Fortunately we returned home to find everything just as we had left it.

Many of us have brought an “intruder” of another kind into our homes this season. In our northern culture, where it is colder and the trees and bushes lie dormant until the warmth of the sun brings them back to life, we bring trees right into our homes. Their pine scent takes us back to nature and their green needles are signs of life. We decorate the tree branches with colored lights and ornaments of various design.

Setting up a Christmas tree requires some temporary rearranging of the furniture. It can seem like a strange tradition, but it is a powerful symbol of what we are remembering and reenacting. Such a large tree does not belong in a house. It is a foreign intruder. We drag it in to stand as a sacrament of sorts – a reminder of life in the barren winter.

The animals’ stable had to be rearranged for Jesus’ birth. Instead of feeding at the manger, the animals had to find their food in some other place. The nightly watch of the shepherds in the field was interrupted; they left their charges to investigate the strange message received from the angels. The lives of Joseph and Mary were certainly intruded upon by this newborn baby who demanded their attention. Their daily schedules were rearranged to accommodate feedings and diaper changes. And consider the sleep deprivation an infant brings; that’s a significant disturbance of the eight hours of sleep needed by healthy adults.

Jesus’ coming into our lives is somewhat of an intrusion. His coming usually requires us to rearrange some of the internal furniture of our lives. It may be behavior patterns that are harmful to ourselves or others. Some of our values may be tested, values instilled by society, yet incongruent with Jesus’ message. Jesus’ coming challenges us to consider if we are spending our lives glorifying ourselves – or glorifying God. Are we investing our lives only in ourselves or are we giving our lives away in service to God and neighbor?

Jesus’ coming not only requires some rearranging of our internal lives. His presence also has a softer dimension. In addition to controlling the schedules of others, babies also bring delight and joy. When Jesus entered people’s lives, his presence was experienced as a gift. He made people feel special, important, and valued. Jesus’ entry into our lives may turn some things upside down, but other things are put in order. Lives are infused with hope and fulfillment. His intrusion is a sacrament, sacred moments when we are united with the Holy One of God.

In the highly acclaimed film, *Jesus of Montreal*, a Canadian actor is selected to play the part of Jesus. As he and the cast prepare for a passion play in Montreal, the young actor goes to the local library one day to research the role. You see him studying the drawings of the crucifixion. As he pores over the book, a librarian comes up to him and poses a single question. She asks, "Looking for Jesus?" The young man says, "Yes, matter of fact I am." And the librarian replies, "*It's He Who will find you,*" and adds, "Peace be with you."

May the Holy Child find you this Christmas. May Jesus' coming be a joyous, although somewhat unsettling, intrusion into your lives.

Loving God, your coming in Jesus of Nazareth was surprising and unexpected. Some like Herod felt threatened by his presence. Others stood in awe of his healing touch. Many pondered his teachings deep in their hearts. Some refused him entry into their lives. Those who were brave followed the radical new way of relationship he modeled.

We, too, receive Jesus with a mixture of responses. Sometimes we welcome him and bask in the comfort he offers. Oftentimes we feel unsettled by the demands he makes; our efforts to follow him are faltering. At times we close him out of our lives, blocking him entrance.

Soften our hearts, O God, diminish our fear, melt our resistance. Send the Holy Child of Bethlehem to us once again, bringing his warm tender touch, his healing embrace, his guiding presence. Send us forth as the shepherds, in awe of his life and transformed by knowing him. As Mary held him in her arms, may our hearts become a cradle love. As Joseph encouraged his growth, may we mature in the likeness of Christ as his presence increases in us.

We welcome the Christ Child, trusting that he will make us whole. In his precious name we pray. Amen.

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