



A WINTER VISION

“The child is father of the man.” — *William Wordsworth*

Christmas 2011

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

There once was a boy who dreamed of great deeds: of kingdoms he would conquer and of giants he would slay. In fact, he was little different from other boys in other times — although he never knew the constraints of a “politically correct” childhood or of “safe” toys. In fact he really never had any toys at all, nor did he particularly need them. The wind and the trees were his companions and the sun-beaten hillsides his classroom. What more is there to say? A boy.



Of course, the boy grew up as boys do, and although life did not treat him badly, the unconstrained freedom of early youth gave way, little by little, to the weight of adult responsibilities. Though the young man’s dreams of high conquest had to yield to the more modest goals of earning a living for his new family, each day brought its daily bread of joys as well as of labors.

That was especially true in the early days, after he married, when he was able to get a small business going in his little town. He owned some livestock, as well, that brought in much-needed income on the side. That was when he was very strong and still full of hope. But then something changed.

Although the man continued to earn a decent living and to raise his children within the limits of that relative happiness that is granted by God to men of good will, the hardships of life had begun to take their toll. Across his broad forehead the worries of human existence had already plowed

their furrows. What hair was left showed much gray. It was mostly because of his youngest son. His son . . . *Why couldn't that one just accept his lot in life? Why are sons forever fighting with their fathers?* There had been scenes. The boy had run off, and no one knew exactly where he was. His mother was beside herself with grief.

And so it was that one winter night — in fact the longest night of the year — after tending to his usual business and having closed his store, the man decided to go out and see how the sheep were faring under the care of the shepherd, who tended to his animals and to those of several other locals. Despite

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the ongoing drought and lack of hay, there had been a bit of lambing in November, and a fresh new class of lambs was hopping around, even in the cold weather. The sight of the sheep in the cave seemed to ease his burden: the man decided to stay awhile, even though his family awaited him near the hearth. A whirlwind of thoughts assailed his mind. He needed to think. Taking a seat on a rustic foot stool, his mind began to meander through the familiar places of his memory. . .

How long had he been there? The sound of excited voices roused him from his deep ponderings, not without causing him a little irritation. What were the shepherds — his own, and others who had just arrived — saying to one another? What was it all about?

At that moment, the man began to realize just how much his life was in a lamentable state. Sadness such as he had never known weighed heavily upon his mind. He felt he must be going mad. Weary and oppressed, he decided to follow the shepherds, who said they must go and see a family in a stable some quarter of a mile from there. The man walked as in a daze.

Emerging from the cave where he had sat for hours, the stars shone with particular brightness. The night seemed full of something good, unlike so many nights that bring only evil to mankind. The shepherds kept mentioning “the holy ones” and “the messengers,” which are what people now call “angels.” It all seemed very much like a dream. The night was very cold, but the man seemed not to notice.

Soon the group reached a small cave, very much like the one where the man had been with his sheep. There were sheep here too, though not so many. Curiously enough a family was there in the cave, settled near a pine-wood torch that illuminated the interior with spurts of light. There was nothing particularly striking about the scene, and yet it all seemed to possess a special beauty — perhaps even a mystery.

But the man was not doing any better; he really was not well. In fact, he felt overwhelmed and ready to break. Was he dying? At this point he no longer knew what he was about, nor what he was to do. He simply did as the others did, drawing near the young family. What else could he do?

It was while gazing at the newborn infant, which the mother held in her arms, that something in him opened — or rather broke — like some festering abscess, like some ancient tumor. An interior light was piercing the darkness, a glimmer of hope was returning. Outside the first signs of dawn were just beginning to color the eastern horizon. The man remembered the Psalm he had heard chanted so often in the synagogue:

Bless the Lord, my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name . . . who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

“Maybe things were not so bad after all,” he began to think. Perhaps his son would come back in the spring, and he would go out to meet him. Maybe the drought would end and there would be lush grass for the animals next year. Maybe the time had come in the world when *He* would come, the King, the Messi. . .



May the Child of Bethlehem help us all to shake off the sorrows of our world grown old — furrowed with age — and renew us in the eternal springtime of Faith. The monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey wish you a very Holy and Merry Christmas.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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