

**Rejoicing in the Enchanting Mystery of Christ Jesus  
based on Luke 2: 1-20, David Jahnke, 12/24/14**

I want to talk tonight about our disenchanting world and how Jesus came to re-enchant the world His Father made with the wonders of the Kingdom of heaven.

I have been watching an excellent t.v. show from 1999 called Freaks and Geeks. It has reminded me of how young people become disenchanting with the world as they become aware how broken it is in mid-late adolescence. This is particularly the case for any of them who are freaks and geeks— those who do not particularly fit in because they are quote-unquote bad or weird.

So our broken world disenchanting us and we become realists.

Jesus' coming to the world teaches us that we are all freaks and geeks compared to him. And that's o.k. thanks be to God, because Jesus hung out with the freaks and geeks of his day. From the very beginning, it was the lowest of the low on society's totem pole hung with him. Shepherds who worked the night shift were not only lowly socio-economically, they were often considered to be sinful for letting their sheep graze on other people's lands. These were the ones whom the heavenly angels greeted. The ones who first saw and worshipped the Messiah.

So Jesus was enchanting a broken world with love from the night of his birth.

But it is not just a broken world which disenchanting us. We, as realistic modern people, disenchant the world. And we protestants have been particularly good at this.

When I was in seminary, a New Testament professor of mine relayed a conversation he had with an African Christian and scholar. They were both amazed that the other either did or did not believe in an enchanted world. The African grew up in a world that was known to be animated by spirits. And my professor told him that westerners, including most western Christians, no longer believed in angels and demons. I think he may have been referring to progressive mainline Christians but, regardless, I was a bit surprised to hear a professor say this.

Our advent study guide tried to disenchant the most enchanted night of the year. It talked about how, since angels had appeared as men in the Old Testament, maybe all the shepherds saw was some men and women singing. When I read this I was like...are you serious? Are we that uncomfortable with miracle?

This rationalizing and de-mythologizing of scripture goes way back, you could say to the patriarchs like Augustine and Origen and their interpreting scripture allegorically; philosophers like Spinoza and Kant in the Enlightenment took it further. Thomas Jefferson picked up on it, cutting out everything supernatural from his new testament. And a Lutheran in the 20<sup>th</sup> century created an entire system of interpretation based on it.

Now maybe their minds were so strong and creative that they did not need a spiritual world to remain filled with wonder and awe. And maybe that's the case of some of you, and if so, you should check out Bultmann and Tillich and Schleiermacher. But I am left wondering not only about the ramifications for the living, active Spirit of God but for the very human world of ideas and emotions and morals. What happens to them in a de-spiritualized world? Are emotions nothing but chemicals floating in our bodies; ideas only neurons in our heads; morals only constructs of culture? What about the self and the soul? Do we not have a will, distinct from the matter of our bodies that allows us to control and influence our emotions, judge ideas, choose the good and act either responsibly or irresponsibly?

Our experience suggests that there is a free will not determined by matter but what is it and where would it come from?

I believe it is Spirit; the image of God. And Jesus came to earth to reanimate this within and around us.

Around the same time that the great Jewish philosopher Spinoza was enlightening the minds of the academy of his day, a Jewish Mystic was quickening the hearts of his people. The man's name was Baal Shem Tov and he was the founder of Hasidic Judaism. And listen to his story-- he lived in the wilderness for a time with his teacher; he had many powerful religious experiences, he was sent out into the world to share what he had experienced and learned and to bring healing. He did just that and was known to do other miracles. He amazed people with his teachings and parables, he lovingly accepted Gentiles, women, the poor and uneducated. He believed that the common man who sincerely loves God and neighbor honors God more than the proud intellectual who knows all kinds of stuff about religion and the Law and philosophy.

The parallels with Jesus are quite amazing aren't they?

A commentator in the documentary mentioned quite rightly that “Every religion today is in need of re-enchantment.” This is what the Baal shem tov did for the intellectual, legalistic Judaism of his day. This is what Jesus did to the zealous Judaism of his day. It is what St. Francis and Luther did for the worldly Catholicism of their day.

One rabbi in the documentary mentioned how the Hasidim become remain enchanted with God and the world. He recalled God’s told Noah to make three levels in the ark, to make a window in the ark, go into the ark with his family and make it their home.<sup>1</sup> The word translated ark is also translated Word. So that the Hasidim, like Noah, enter into the Word and make the Word their home and make windows in it and allow the light of God to pour into their souls—all of this through study and prayer. On the first floor of this home is all the creatures of the earth—we become united to the earth and find it is our home. On the second is the angels and divine messengers. And when we reach the top, we see that all is one in God who connects all things.

On this night, we remember that the Word of God has made a home for us. And as we make the Word our dwelling place; as we commit to prayer and study and spiritual fellowship with our children and with the extended family of God, the world becomes enchanted for us once again. We receive the Kingdom of God within and around us like a child. And just as they are filled with wonder and joy and curiosity, so are we once again.

I want to conclude with a rock-and-roll illustration from the band Rush. Their great lyricist Neal Peart had earlier dedicated an entire album to the anti-Christian uber libertarian Ayn Rand—yuck. But in his 30s, he wrote this:

The more we think we know about, the greater the unknown  
We suspend our disbelief, and we are not alone

Mystic rhythms--  
capture my thoughts and carry them away  
Nature seems to spin in a supernatural way

Mystic rhythms –  
under city lights or a canopy of stars  
We feel the powers and we wonder what they are  
We feel the push and pull...of restless rhythms from afar [Mystic Rhythms off  
Power Windows]

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<sup>1</sup> This must be a rabbinic addition or commentary on the text.

So while it is natural to become disenchanted with the world, after a while, this generally becomes an excuse for selfishness and bitterness. But if we open our hearts and minds and our eyes and ears and pay attention to the mystic rhythms and divine melodies, we find ourselves in Love literally in the world and in love with the world. And we want others to know and feel the same and that's when we commit ourselves to Loving others as we have been loved. Thanks be to God the Father, Jesus the Son, and their Spirit of Love in the world. And God's people say...

The wise men saw the light and felt the pulse of God's Kingdom;  
they went and offered their gifts to the newborn King;  
may we do the same every day of our lives.