

“A Morning Star Rises”

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“Out of the stars have we come, up from time....
Out of the stars in their flight, out of the dust of eternity, here have we come,
Stardust and sunlight, mingling through time and through space.
Out of the stars have we come....”

Robert Weston’s timeless words find their way home this morning as a morning star rises again. Is it magic? Is it mystery? Is it science? Is it so? Yes, yes, yes, and yes. Whatever you believe or wish you could believe or perhaps hold at a safe distance about the holiday/holy day that is Christmas, can we each and all affirm that we are here and now alive in time and space and yes, in timelessness and a cosmos whose boundaries leave our imaginations far behind?

Which should not stop us from imagining. So imagine... “For each child that’s born a morning star rises” and really does “sing to the universe who you are...” Each child means every child who has ever lived, which means every person who has ever lived. In the spirit of Christmas, I wondered. George Johnson, a source who seems reliable enough as a writer for *Discover Magazine*, estimates that the so-called modern human has been on the earth for about 52,000 years and that over that period of time, 108 billion people have lived. This includes the 7 billion of us living right now. I wondered some more. Fifty-two thousand years hold how many mornings, each with a morning star? Think 3,650,000 morning stars, not quite enough for each of the 108 billion babies who have ever been born.

And I wondered some more. How many stars are there in the sky? Just a month ago Megan Garber asked the same question as the title of an article she authored for *The Atlantic*.

“You look up into the night sky,” she writes. “Before you—above you, around you—stretches a pitch-black canvas washed with streaks and studs of brightness. You are, you realize, surrounded by light that has traveled the expanse of the universe to reach your eyes. You feel tiny and enormous at the same time. You are... awed.

But what, actually, is so awesome? How many stars are you actually seeing? Why simply marvel at the majesty and mystery of it all *when you can also do some math?*”

Math is probably not what you counted on in our worship time today; but math itself holds wonder and discovery and awe and mystery. How many stars in the sky? In our neighborhood of the Universe that is the Milky Way, there are about 400 billion stars. Now bend your mind, stay with the math, and keep moving. In the roughly 170 galaxies known to be out there, the estimate is one septillion stars. That’s one plus 24 zeroes!

Back to the challenge of not enough morning stars for all the babies who have ever been born. Maybe, just maybe over the millennia and biennia, there are more than enough morning stars for each and every baby!

“For each child that’s born, a morning star rises...” At least one per baby, and countless more unseen and unknown.

Of course the legendary birth of the child Jesus holds the story of the star. For those among us who must have facts, hold the breath of your disbelief for a few precious moments and consider the time in which Jesus was probably born. I don’t mean December 25, in the kickoff of the first millennium, but whenever and wherever, though surely in the Middle East, that Fertile Crescent of mystery and wisdom and science and mathematics. It was a time of oppression for so many, not unlike our own time. It was a time of yearning for so many, not unlike our own time. It was a time when hope against hope was the stuff of dreams and dreams were the stuff of awe. If only someone would rise among us who would fight back against the greed and violence of this time! A revolutionary, a warrior, a Messiah perhaps. Are we talking 2,000 years ago or now?

Nobody, but nobody I know, wants their beautiful precious child to grow up to be a revolutionary, a warrior, or a Messianic figure who rallies against the bullies of this world. Yet here is the story of a baby who did that. Yes, there are others, others whose lives we know a lot more about than we know about the life of Jesus. But continue to hold the breath of your disbelief and imagine that Jesus really did grow in wisdom and questioned the most learned teachers of Jerusalem and then disappeared from history for twenty years before surfacing as a learned teacher himself, a teacher whom his closest friends called rabbi. This rabbi spoke the language of stories that held deep truths; he touched peoples hearts and minds and healed; he welcomed the unwelcome and befriended the friendless and questioned authority as much as any Unitarian Universalist kid I know. Of course for anyone behaving as he did amid the occupation of Palestine by the Roman Empire, there were consequences. The consequences for Jesus and all who followed his teachings were harsh but unfolded in a story that has touched the hearts of believers and doubters and questioners and searchers across the centuries.

His could be no ordinary birth. This guy was a superhero swaddled from the beginning in starlight.

Whoa! Why not any baby ever born? Remember, there are enough stars to go around for each child to have her own star guiding wise men and wise women and shepherds and the simply curious to go and see that this child is for real.

The beauty of the Star of the East is that it is noticed. It is the first star of morning, shining in the direction in which the sun rises day after day, millennium after millennium, back into the time before the course of life turned in the direction of humankind. Is it miracle or science that we are here at all? What were the odds? Who’s to say that the birth of a child a mere two thousand plus years ago couldn’t embody the promise and power to love that every child ever born holds with their very first cry? Every child holds the promise and power to love of the baby in the manger.

While not all of us are parents, we were all babies. We all carry traces of the vulnerability of our infancy. When that vulnerability that becomes trust is honored by nurture and guidance as luminous as a morning star, hope is born as if for the first time. And when the vulnerability that becomes trust is not so honored, there is still hope as long as breath is drawn. As I say when I dedicate a child, “The promise of every new life is the hope of that life’s fulfillment.”

“Out of the stars” have we come...”out of the dust of eternity...stardust and sunlight, mingling through time and space.” Of course we are “our grandmothers’ prayers and ...our grandfathers’ dreamings.” Of course we’re “the breath of our ancestors” and “the spirit of God.” For you and you and you and me “a morning star rises.” It rises again and again, “singing “to the universe who we are.” And if we listen closely, the universe sings back, for we are one.

Amen.

Sources

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Robert T. Weston, “Out of the Stars,” in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, 530.