

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

Isaiah 11:1-4a, 6, OT p. 640
 Luke 2:1-20, NT p. 58

December 24, 2011
 Christmas Eve
 Marilyn Allen

Some children see Him lily white, the baby Jesus born this night,
 Some children see Him lily white, with tresses soft and fair.
 Some children see Him bronzed and brown, the Lord of heaven to earth come down,
 Some children see Him bronzed and brown, with dark and heavy hair.

Some children see Him almond-eyed, this Savior whom we kneel beside,
 Some children see Him almond-eyed, with skin of yellow hue.
 Some children see Him dark as they, sweet Mary=s Son, to whom we pray,
 Some children see Him dark as they, and ah! They love Him, too!

The children in each different place will see the baby Jesus= face
 Like theirs, but bright with heavenly grace, and filled with holy light.
 O lay aside each earthly thing, and with thy heart as offering,
 Come worship now the infant King, =Tis love that=s born tonight!¹

A=Tis love that=s born tonight!@

AA little child shall lead them,@ the prophet said.

Tonight we gather around the Child of Bethlehem. Children, especially, are drawn to the baby Jesus. They Alay aside each earthly thing,@ and see only the Baby. We know, of course, that this child of Mary grew up. He stood with sinners in the Jordan River. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, taught his disciples, and gave his life in self-sacrificing love. But tonight is about the child of Bethlehem B poor, vulnerable, and very human, yet full of promise.

The children of the world gather around the manger. They come with hope for the necessities of life. They come in peace, praying that their families and neighbors will be safe. They come seeking love, the unconditional love that says, AYou are worthwhile. You are a child of God.@

¹Wihla Hutson, ASome Children See Him,@ copyright 1954, 1957 by Hollis Music, Inc., from *Hymns for the Family of God*, p. 181.

Often they bring their wisdom, and we are blessed by it. I want to share with you something that a mother of a young child wrote in a recent issue of *Christian Century*.² She had decided to keep Christmas really simple, so she talked with her toddler son every day about the details of the Christmas story, made cookies and jam, and together they made paper chains to put on the Christmas tree. A few days before Christmas, the nativity scene was placed under the tree, ready for baby Jesus. One day she was in the kitchen when her son went into the living room. Now in her words:

I heard rummaging in the living room, then the metallic tinkle of ornaments on the lower boughs. Minutes later he was standing beside me, a solemn three-year-old holding a stuffed red heart that he=d taken from the tree.

AMommy,@ he announced. APretend that I am Gabriel.@

I looked at the chocolate around his lips, the sleeves of his Henley rolled up for wings, and his utterly sincere and serious eyes.

AKneel down, Mommy,@ he instructed me. I obliged. Gabriel and I were face-to-face, inches apart, in front of the stove.

AMary,@ he addressed me. AYou shall have a son. And this,@ he extended the plush red heart toward my face. AThis is your holy.@ Here, he paused for emphasis. AYou must carry your holy with you always, Mommy B even around your neck B so that Jesus will know that he is holy too.@

I looked at the heart offering, velvet and gold, resting in my hand. What to do with hot coals of a prophet?

Then, perhaps overcome by the force of his own inspiration, my Gabriel turned and fled back to the creche to distribute more of the Aholy@ to the creatures assembled there.

Slowly I got to my feet. For a moment my son had seen heaven and had offered me a glimpse.... I looked at the heart again. My world doesn=t involve a lot of angel sightings, but as I reflected on what had just transpired, I realized that my world didn=t leave much room for wonder either. My son was far better attuned to the ways in which the sacred speaks.... AUnless you become like children, you won=t enter the kingdom

²Kathleen Hirsch, AGlimpse of the holy,@ from *Christian Century*, November 29, 2011, Vol., 128, No. 24, p. 10.

of heaven, the words rang in my ears.

Who deserves such breathtaking moments? Certainly not I, satisfied as I was with a season of reduced consumption and expanded calm. Holiness is wilder and less easily corralled, vaster than picture books and recipes. It erupts into the mundane order of our days and reveals whatever inside of us is on intimate terms with the divine.

Unless you become like little children... This night, as we sing and pray and wait for the light to come slowly around the room, may we find the grace to become like children. May we be touched with wonder and holiness and love. And within each of us, may the Spirit of the Holy Child be born anew.

Come to us this night, O Christ. May we be filled with your love, that we may go out in the strength of your Spirit to live as light in the darkness of our world. Amen.