

WHY NOT A STAR?

You must first hear this - from the anthology edited by Arna Bontemps, American Negro Poetry. In December, 1942 Frank Horne wrote, under the title, "Kid Stuff":

The wise guys
tell me
that Christmas
is Kid Stuff . . .
Maybe they've got
something there--
Two thousand years ago
three wise guys
chased a star
across a continent
to bring
frankincense and myrrh
to a Kid
born in a manger
with an idea in his head . . .

And as the bombs
crash
all over the world
today
the real wise guys
know
that we've all
got to go chasing stars
again
in the hope
that we can get back
some of that
Kid Stuff
born two thousand years ago.

I won't take very long this morning. The question which my topic asks is, "Why Not A Star?" And we'll get to that a little later.

Right now - another question: Have we ever needed Christmas more than it is needed today? My answer to that is: No, I really don't believe that we have ever needed Christmas more than we do now. And, sitting where you are at this time, in your seats of disadvantage, some of you (anyway) may be asking yourselves: "What does he mean, 'need' Christmas? It just comes, and we have it. What's he getting at?"

I'll tell you what I'm talking about, what I'm getting at. I'm talking about "Kid Stuff" - the real, the important, the no-foolin', the honest-to-God, bare-boned stuff that is needed. I'm getting at what Christmas ought to imply and be. We are already involved in the usual, expected mechanics. We give and receive our greetings and our little gifts. And these are supposed to say, again, that love remembers. We sing songs of hope, and carols of great joy that shall be to all people. And these are flung against the thick, murky shadows of vast collective denials in a Detroit, an Africa, a Chicago, a Vietnam, a Czechoslovakia. We garland the abstractions and the generalities with tinsle and candlelight - - and we "pray for peace". . . on earth, in Vietnam, in our hearts

Well - - what did you expect to hear? The old story? Matthew and Luke, piece-meal edited and scrambled together to paint the comfortable, familiar landscape of a long-ago maternity? Sorry. It's not enough. Oh, it's all right; it's good. But we

get hung up. We become sidetracked. The far-off, ethereal qualities; the intangible, mysterious beauties that somehow do indeed hold the actual and total impact -- these manage to get done in. The beauty that the old story is; the "kid stuff" that pleads today for mature, timely, sensitive audience is more than tired tradition, more than threadbare theology.

The simplicity of the whole scene is breathtaking. And more than that, I think, to any person who has really gotten the message (by whatever means, medium, or messenger), the simplicity must cause an embarrassment. Just to think, and realize, that so uncomplicated, so basic and understandable a message has been allowed to be muddled to an unrecognizable mash -- Embarrassing! Dr. Morton Scott Enslin, scholar, author, and professor said it in far more sophisticated terms: "At a very early date Christians were struck by" the utter void in information about the very beginning and early years of the life of the leader and principle exponent of the new faith, so they "sought to remedy the lack." A couple of writers got busy and wrote conflicting and contradictory accounts of the conception, the birth, and the politics surrounding that unknown.

That's all it took, and since those writings, subsequent readings (apparently in great measure) have missed the message, the breathtaking beauty and simplicity of the whole scene. But Frank Horne got it -- and summed it up. Whamo! "Two thousand years ago three wise guys chased a star across a continent to bring frankincense and myrrh to a Kid born in a manger . . ." I pause there because, essentially, that's as far as two thousand years have gotten it. But Horne goes on, because Horne got the message, and (possibly) out of embarrassment for a whole world of people, pleads the simplicity of the case. Yes, he goes on: ". . .bringing (things) to a Kid born in a manger WITH AN IDEA IN HIS HEAD . . . And as the bombs crash all over the world today the real wise guys know that we've all got to go chasing stars again in the hope that we can get back some of that Kid Stuff born two thousand years ago."

What do I mean, "need" Christmas? That's what I mean. If today, more than ever before in the life of man in this world, there is not the need to "go chasing stars again in the hope . . ." -- then I am reading the conditions of our day all wrong.

There is "good" today - much of it, within local reach and at farther remove. There is lots of "good", being thought, being said, being written, being done. I do not deny this, nor ignore it. Perhaps I am simply intolerably impatient, not willing to just wait for that Kid Stuff to catch on. Two thousand years since a Kid was born in a manger with an idea in his head. That quite a lot of days, and a lot of lives. And I'm not at all convinced that the "idea in his head" (something to do with peace, good will, brotherhood) has had much of a hearing, or sold very well.

Our carols of joy and our songs of hope; our greetings and gifts and garlands: they symbolize, but only that. They are not Christmas. They are good, and they are pleasant, and they are comforting. They possess a beauty and a majesty all their own. They surely belong -- if we will celebrate and frolick and worship at all.

But the "need" is for Christmas -- a happening to a person, inside. And the "real wise guys know . . ." Listen to these lines, written by Margaret K. Gooding, D.R.E. at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Phoenix, Arizona. She titles her thoughts, "Why Not A Star?"

They told me that when Jesus was born a star appeared in the heavens above the place where the young child lay.

And since I was very young and had no trouble believing wondrous things I believed in the star.

It was a wonderful miracle, part of a long ago story, foretelling an uncommon life.

They told me a super nova appeared in the heavens in its dying burst of fire about the time the babe was probably born, its appearance recorded in the histories of our time.

And since I was older and believed in science and reason above all else I believed the story of the star explained.

It was a scientific fact, foretelling nothing, merely the source of a lovely but wholly unbelievable legend.

But I found I was unwilling to give up the star. It seemed a fitting symbol for the birth of one whose uncommon life has been remembered long.

The star explained became the star understood, for Jesus, for Buddha, for Zarathustra.

Why not a star? Some bright star shines somewhere in the heavens each time a child is born. And who knows what it may foretell? For who knows what uncommon life may yet again unfold, if we but give it a chance?