Abbot's Notes

Christmas Letter

Christmas Poem by Aaron Buckley

Star in the sky
like candy in the bowl—children gather round
the fireplace, the stories told go and go and go—
grandma in her tinseled sweater passes eggnog;
granpa and dad toot on train whistles, the toy engine
slowly halting at the station in the village
while villagers look out their painted eyes
through their frosted windows
out towards the sky—
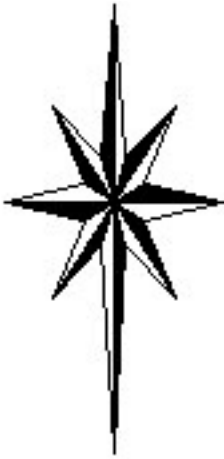
Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee
to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David
to register with Mary, who was pledged
to be married to him, expecting child.
While they were there, the time came for baby to be born,
and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because
there was no room in the inn—

Imagine warm pictures of sweet candy lights,
glowing snow packed in gutters—imagine every miracle, every joy
as cold cold cold as the air, as the stillness, from our lovely windows,
as bare elements. I remind myself:
    "'Tis the season"
        or
    "Is the reason"—
I see it up on hilltops or billboards, and, yes it hits a chord, so
I might say:
    "Yes. Yes, yes, yes: 'tis the season." and walk my way
    looking at posters of mangers next to posters of Rangers
    with bows and happy wives clasping hands to their mouths—

and then I feel that I am too far away from the "season,"
from *the reason*;

    too far away to feel the bite
    of cold that is cold enough to drink: the reason: the lesson:

    Not so much the Birthday:
    Not so much the Sacrifice
        or the Teachings or the Rising:
    But what came to follow, and
        what follows.

Abbot's Notes

Peace be unto you and yours.
Merry Christmas!

Thank you for reading this note. A blessed Christmas Season to you and yours.

The preceding poem was written by Aaron Buckley for us all. Aaron, thank you. Please feel free to let him know your take on his poem:

aaronbuckley@rocketmail.com

Aaron is currently working on his Master's degree in 20th Century American Literature at California State-East Bay and lives in the Livermore area. He highly welcomes your comments. And given Aaron's poem, what is there to be said about Christmas?

And then we have the Christmas Spirit. It is a strange time of year. Some people are bubbling with the joys of the seasons, others are in the doldrums because of the season. The some younger kids are in wonderment; the some teenage kids are in angst; some new parents are experiencing Christmas with a different set of eyes; some older parents are dreaming of a Christmas past; and some of us are dreaming of a Christmas that never was or even could have been. And Christmas happens. And Paradoxes abound.

We also know that more often than not, how we respond to life events creates a mantle of comfort or discomfort. Life is our creation. The Christmas Sprit is what we bring to the table of Life. There is no Christmas Sprit as such unless we each create it—for the benefit of one and all.

What is the Christmas Spirit but a modicum of peace—as Christ is alleged to have said: *My Peace I give unto, my peace I leave unto you— not as the world gives, but as I give.* (John 14:27).

What is the nature of this peace but a quiet mind—not necessarily a still mind, but a quiet mind. Just quiet enough to listen to the Great Silence abounding in the supposed chaos of a world surrounding us. Or is all that chaos just in my mind where I have created it via perception. Perhaps it is all just occurrences, if that.

How do we attain a quiet mind? Many ways. Sometimes just paying attention to our breathing, the space between the inhale and exhale does the trick. Sometimes just being in wonderment that you are doing what you are doing or not doing .. Paying attention to paying attention, let's say. Just being aware.

Being aware even when we are not aware, we let our consciousness settle as we then let our life unfold in the moment just as it is: joy, sorrow, anger, laughter, patience, impatience. We come to realize that it really just does not matter — and it does not matter that it does not matter. It just doesn't matter. We realize we are the Silence.

We appreciate that we are not really separate from anyone or anything. We are One in the Spirit and there is no difference between One and Spirit as they are neither, but the same One Spirit we are and are not in but this moment now.

Hence..
 But what came to follow, and
  what follows

As suggested when the historical Christ is said to have prayed:
May all of them be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us … (John 17:21).

May we be but Peace.
Peace and Joy!
+Robert OSB

Installing Love

**Install Love: Some inspiration for Today's Technical World -
By Fr. Gerry Caprio**

I have spent a fair amount of time in the IT world and am always on the lookout for technology metaphors for the spiritual life. Several years ago I came across this anonymous piece that I think really hits the mark on the significance of love. I hope you will appreciate it and employ its wisdom each day. Blessings and best wishes to you and yours!

Service Rep: Yes, how can I help you today?

Customer: Well, after much consideration, I've decided to install LOVE.EXE. Can you guide me through the process?

R: Yes, I can help you. Are you ready to proceed?

C: Well, I'm not very technical, but I think I'm ready to install now. What do I do first?

R: The first step is to open your HEART program. Have you located your HEART program?

C: Yes I have and am closing it, but there are several other programs running right now. Is it okay to install while they are running?

R: What other programs are running?

C: Let's see, I have PAST-HURT.EXE, LOW-ESTEEM.EXE, GRUDGE.EXE, and RESENTMENT.EXE running right now.

Rep: No problem. LOVE will gradually erase PAST-HURT.EXE from your current operating system. It may remain in your permanent memory, but it will no longer disrupt other programs. LOVE will eventually overwrite LOW-ESTEEM.EXE

Installing Love (con't)

with a module of its own called HIGH-ESTEEM.EXE. However, you have to completely turn off GRUDGE.EXE and RESENTMENT.EXE. Those programs prevent LOVE from being properly installed. Can you close those programs now?

C: I don't know how to turn them off. Can you tell me how?

R: OK. Go to your Start menu and invoke FORGIVENESS.EXE. Do this as many times as necessary until GRUDGE.EXE and RESENT-MENT.COM have been completely erased.

C: Okay, done. LOVE has started installing itself automatically. Is that normal?

Yes. You should receive a message that says it will reinstall for the life of your HEART. Do you see that message?

C: Yes I do. Is the installation complete?

R: Yes, but remember that you have only the base program. You need to begin connecting to other HEARTS in order to get the upgrades.

C: Oops. I have an error message already. What should I do?

R: What does the message say?

C: It says "ERROR 412 - PROGRAM CANNOT RUN ON INTERNAL COMPONENTS ALONE." What does that mean?

R: Don't worry. That's a common problem. It means that the LOVE program is set up to run on external HEARTS but has not yet been run on your HEART. It is one of those complicated programming things, but in non-technical terms it means you have to activate LOVE on your own machine before you can run LOVE on others.

C: So what should I do?

R: Can you pull down the directory called SELF-ACCEPTANCE?

C: Yes, I have it.

R: Click on the following files and then copy them to the MYHEART directory: FORGIVE-SELF.DOC, REALIZE-WORTH.TXT, and AC-KNOWLEDGE-LIMITATIONS.DOC. The system will overwrite any conflicting files and begin patching any faulty programming. Also, you need to delete VERBOSE-CRITIC.EXE from all directories, and then empty your recycle bin afterwards to make sure it is completely gone and never comes back.

C: Got it! My HEART is filling up with new files. SMILE.MPG is playing on my monitor right now and it shows that PEACE.EXE, and CONTENT-MENT.COM are copying themselves all over my HEART. Is this normal?

R: Sometimes. For others it takes a while, but eventually everything gets downloaded at the proper time. So, LOVE is installed and running. You should be able to handle it from here. One more thing before I go. LOVE is freeware. Be sure to give it and its various modules to everybody you meet. They will in turn share it with other people and they will return some similarly cool modules back to you.

C: I will. Thanks for your help.

R: Remember to activate and schedule daily maintenance for maximum efficiency.

*(Fr. Gerry is planning a discussion group(s) with the topic being **Life-Issues**. Please e-mail interest/comments to:* **geraldcaprio@hotmail.com**)

How to Detach from a Belief—Why?

How to detach from a belief and experience freedom and peace of mind? Use a centering meditation taught by Tarthang Tulku in his *Hidden Mind of Freedom:*

"Working with thoughts (beliefs) by opening them as they arise can bring many pleasant feelings, which—without attachment—also become our meditation. We can even go into the thoughts that judge other thoughts, and, embracing this judging mind, become united with it."

"By relying on the light of awareness you can see that the difficulties you face are manifestations of your own concepts. Going deeply into your thoughts, you will see how you create your experience, how you alone are the judge who determines heaven and hell, good and bad. "

"Whatever experience arises, stay with it, expand it, and heat it up. If you remain within the intense core of the experience, the meditator unites with thoughts and emotions, and everything dissolves. Then awareness grows powerful and one-pointed. As thoughts and emotions are increasingly included within this field of awareness, they become more useful. Instead of being a cause of frustration or confusion, they become agents of well-being. . . . "

And why?

A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt. He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one." The grandson asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?" The grandfather answered, "The one I *feed.* *(Thank you Michael Butler)*

May all beings be happy.
Amen.