

## ***Wonder, Awe, Anticipation***

by Rev. Robert Griffith

If you haven't lost it by the time you're thirty, then you are doing better than most people. I'm not talking about your memory, or your marbles, I'm talking about that wide eyed, child-like, sense of wonder – that sense of awe – that sense of incredible anticipation. This was something that for many of us, was so much a part of our lives when we were in kindergarten and primary school – and that wonder and awe was especially heightened at this time of the year as Christmas approaches. It was that sense that something bigger than us, something exciting, something miraculous happens at Christmas time.

A sense that was fostered by those age old stories: The story of the young frightened couple; the donkey; the journey; the tiny, insignificant and over-crowded town; the inn with the no vacancy sign. The story of the young woman about to give birth; the shepherds on the hillsides caring for their sheep; the angel choirs in the heavens; the voices from on high proclaiming good news; the shepherds racing across the fields to Bethlehem – to find a baby born in a stable, laying in the animal feeding trough.

All the stories and that sense of wonder were enhanced by the Nativity plays in church and at one time long ago, even in all our public schools. We may even have acted in one when we were young! That sense of wonder was enhanced too by the familiar carols: *Away in a Manger, Silent night, O little town of Bethlehem*. Sung not only in our Church services, but by carol singers in the streets, and sounding forth in our department stores and supermarkets. It had us wide eyed, full of wonder, and with it: we believed, we believed profoundly, with all our hearts as young children, filled with awe and wonder and faith and anticipation. We believed that God was in this wonderful story, that God was entering our humanity, that God in Jesus – the baby, was actually here with us.

But today as you wearily drag yourself around the shopping malls – passing the fake Santa, the decorated trees, the crowded checkouts - you hear once more those Christmas songs about reindeer and elves and mistletoe and jingling bells, that often seem to have little if anything to do with Christmas. Somehow the magic, and the wonder of it all can too easily disappear, as you find yourself longing to hear a real Christmas carol, longing for something with more substance, longing for that sense of wonder you once enjoyed.

But the greatest challenge to us today is not just recapturing that sense of wonder and awe in God as Christmas approaches – we may be lucky and our heart may still skip a beat as we taste and see that the Lord is good once more in the spirit of Christmas – even if only for a day or a week. The more serious challenge to us all is to recapture that joy, that awe and that child-like sense of wonder EVERY day of the year – for *that* is what God intended for us; *that* is what God desires in us; *that* is the whole reason why God gave us His Son, our Saviour Jesus in the first place: to reconcile us to our Creator God and restore our relationship with Him for eternity so that every day is Christmas Day! Every day can be a day when we are lost in wonder, awe and anticipation – just as God intended all along.

Please follow the link below to a video clip and watch it before coming back to the this sermon.

*“Rediscovering Wonder”* by Rob Bell

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_detailpage&v=dF-V\\_t\\_NSHw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=dF-V_t_NSHw)

In our attempt to follow the Apostle Paul's instruction to put childish ways behind us as we press on and grow up into Christ and become mature disciples, I fear that we have forgotten the equally clear instruction of Jesus Himself that we should never, ever lose our child-like faith, trust, abandonment, hope and that powerful sense of awe and wonder about not only Christmas, but everything in this incredible creation and this eternal salvation God has lavished on us by His grace.

Let me underline something Rob Bell just said in that video:

*"There is this primal sense of wonder and awe on the face of a child when they are fully absorbed in the moment. They're thrilled with this sense of anticipation – as they wonder what kind of experiences are just around the corner. It is something to behold – this pure, unbridled joy."*

*That* is how God wants you to be every day of your life – not just when you were a child who didn't know any better! *That* is how God wants you to arrive every Sunday, not just the Sunday before Christmas – or on Christmas day.

Life has a way of beating that wonder and awe out of us. Worse still, we can believe the lie which says that such wonder and awe is childish and we need to grow out of it and let such wide-eyed anticipation remain back in our childhood. That is a lie from hell and it needs to be sent back there. To adopt a child-like posture is to be open to the wonder and the awe which is around us every single moment of every single day.

Maybe you lost that wide-eyed sense of wonder and awe a long, long time ago. Maybe you left it behind in your childhood because you thought you were supposed to. Maybe the Church beat it out of you as the life-sucking, awe-destroying spirit of religion invaded our pulpits, our prayers and our pastoral ministries.

One of the greatest components of this child-like, wide-eyed sense of wonder and awe is anticipation. You can see in the face of a child so often - as they wonder what's coming next. They forget the past in a micro-second, they consume and capture every moment of the present like it's a precious and exciting gift to be unwrapped ... and ... they always anticipate that more is coming. As they live and enjoy each second of this wonderful experience called life, they dream of the next moment, and the next and the next. Always anticipating life has more to offer than what they are enjoying right now.

*That* is how you and I are meant to live every day of our lives! *That* is how God made us! *That* is the child-like attitude which leads us to embrace the fullness of the kingdom of God – here and now – not just in the next life!

As this Christmas season unfolds before us again, God is inviting us week by week, to an experience – to a taste of the full, vibrant, dynamic life of God which He insists is available to every single one of us, right here, right now. The entire story of Christmas is 'Emmanuel' – God is with us. God created our world and put each of us in this world but then God came near ... God came into this world and into humanity and into our lives.

Do we believe that? Do we really and truly believe that? If we do, then maybe this Christmas will be different. Maybe this Christmas will leave behind something in our lives other than a credit card bill. Maybe this year, God will take us back to that time when we lost the wonder, the awe, the imagination, the dreams, the anticipation – as we hear Him say to us that this is where we belong. This is the life He died to give us.

We were never meant to grow out of that child-like dependency, trust, joy, anticipation and moment by moment experience of life and of God. *That* is our destiny. *That* is our calling. *That* is the Christian life as God intended and Jesus secured all that for us in His life, death and resurrection. Everything else is second-best! Everything else is man-made religion! Everything else is a lifeless regurgitation of a story which means nothing today in our lives and even less to the world around us.

It you have the courage to ask God to re-birth the true spirit of Christmas in you this year – the true spirit of the Church – the true spirit of Christ in our midst ... and bring back the sense of awe, the sense of wonder, the sense of wide-eyed anticipation of what God will do next ... then you just need to pray with me now and trust Him to do exactly that.

Let's pray:

*Our Lord and our God we bless You, we honour You, we worship You, we lay our lives before you again this day. We praise you and thank you for the miracle of Christmas and the reason for this season. We praise you for the incarnation, that mind-blowing, world-transforming miracle where you stepped out of eternity into time so you could rescue all of us and take us out of time and back into eternity – where You always planned for us to be with You.*

*Lord, there are so many reasons why we left the awe and wonder and excitement and moment by moment anticipation behind us in the past ... and none of them are worthy of such a loss. There is nothing so important in this world that it should rob us of that child-like faith and anticipation.*

*Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus, You said it very clearly – there is no alternate translation – no textual dispute – no debate at all .... If we want to the experience the fullness, the reality, the power and the wonder of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven – right here and now, then we must come as a child – full of faith, full of trust, full of wonder, excitement, amazement, awe and spine-tingling anticipation that You will do all that You have promised to do and You will revive us again and pour out your spirit upon our families, Your Church, and this wonderful, but broken and dysfunctional world of ours.*

*Holy Spirit of God, as You led those excited shepherds into presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords that Holy night so long ago, come now, in Jesus' name, and do the same for us over the next few weeks, so we too might be filled once again with a sense of awe and wonder, not only at this Christmas time, but especially beyond this season and into the next exciting, highly anticipated chapter of our journey with each other and with our God.*

*In the mighty, matchless and wonderful name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*