

“When Words Become Flesh...”

Madeline Duckett RSM



1

Welcome to CEN 2023! For us it marks a new year of growing contemplative awareness, and the communal work of helping to shift the tectonic plates of consciousness towards greater compassion and healing through meditation and intention.

2020-2021 were years that took us to the edge in the dark world of pandemic, with all its dangers and challenges on every level of global and local existence. 2022 was imagined as a year of slow recovery from the emotional and physical strain on everyone. Instead, it turned out to be a year replete with new struggles and disasters for thousands of people in this country and around the world. Climate events of unprecedented magnitude and their fatal effects on life and habitat; the outbreak of war in the Ukraine impacting the world, and the world’s responses, creating greater division and strain on resources; uprisings, violent demonstrations everywhere; the death of a much-loved monarch and symbol of unity in the UK, followed by political unrest forcing two elections; continuing unrest in the USA; and in Australia, political infighting and untold financial pressures on many ...the list is endless.

Against this backdrop, as we begin 2023 and review our reflections from last year, we see patterns and invitations emerging: to move into contemplative depths not plumbed before; to release our tears of sorrow and loss; to make room in our hearts for nature with its messages of death and rebirth; to read between the lines of events and happenings, and enter the silent spaces between; to travel well in all that we do and wherever we go; and in all, to see the world with the eyes of the artist and poet and learn from this.

With all of this in mind, as the year begins, we again move quickly from peaceful scenes of a child born in a stable to huge celebrations with spectacular fireworks lighting the night sky. We mark a new beginning, make resolutions to change our mind-sets, and behaviours, and hope that the New Year starting will be better than the year (even years) just ending.

As we open into the CEN journey for this year, we could ask ourselves what is the deeper reality happening in all of the above? In his classic work *Four Quartets*, *Dry Salvages*, T. S. Eliot writes:

*We had the experience but missed the meaning
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness.²*

¹ AdobeStock_230774830 1140, licence held by Ann-Maree O’Beirne RSM

² T S Eliot, *Four Quartets*, Faber and Faber, London. P29.

What is the *meaning* we may have missed? How might we *approach* the meaning to restore the experience of Christmas and New Year in light of the years that have gone before, restoring it to a *different form, beyond any meaning we can assign to happiness?*

The movement from a humble crib to crowds watching spectacular firework displays can be a reminder of the journey in which we are engaged—from innocence and vulnerability to greater and more complex consciousness. This journey is one we take, consciously or unconsciously, in our personal lives, and it is the journey of all life—human and otherwise. Remaining true to the deepest truth of who and what we are, on this journey, is challenging. The image of the stable and the crib point to our origins and we must not forget them! We must hold our vulnerable beginnings close in awareness as we unfold and grow in the search for directions, career paths and callings.



3

A Christmas reflection from Don Riso quoted in the Enneagram Institute's 2022 Christmas message somehow speaks to this:

Perhaps the unconscious power of the Nativity lies in the fact that it reminds us that whenever we are in touch with our True Nature, (our essence) we too, are being born. This birth happens every moment we come into contact with what is most real and essential in ourselves—the eternal Consciousness that is the source [of our being and] of all Being. When we contact this, the eternal is once again born in the material. But...like the birth of a baby, the birth of consciousness is something that happens in time and in the world of form. For virtually everyone, the birth of consciousness in us is too soon lost in a "death" of awareness, in a forgetting of our True Nature and of our own divine centre.

From this point of view, the birth of the infant Jesus is perhaps an unconscious acknowledgment that the arising of consciousness...is feeble and could easily be lost. For most of us, consciousness is vulnerable and [initially is] without deep roots. Whenever something this pure comes into the world, there is always the brutality and ignorance of a "Herod" to snuff it out. But even here, the birth of Jesus is also an affirmation that not only can consciousness (and our own divinity) be awakened in us—but that, as in Jesus of the Gospels—it could deepen and grow and transform the world.

Seen in this way, Christmas is an occasion to see this birth as the archetype of a much deeper kind of birth: the birth of consciousness, the penetration of the darkness by the Light, the birth of the divine in the human, and a decisive reorientation of human consciousness, once and for all.



From Riso's perspective, we are all participants in what we could call the "archetype of deeper birth". When we see the infant in the crib as Christ-consciousness bursting forth in the form of a baby with potential to grow and become something beyond our imagining, and act from this awareness, we participate in manifesting this archetype in time and outer form. In other words, when we see beyond externals to the essence—the True Nature—of ourselves and everything around us, and act from this deeper seeing, we are midwifing Christ-consciousness in the world around us. We also evolve it in ourselves.

4

Entering the deeper Ground of our being in contemplative prayer and joining with others in contemplation, either physically or by intention, we sink further into our "True Nature" and the common Ground-of-all-Being. We become part of the emergence of this Christ-consciousness that can transform the world. We begin to sense that weakness and vulnerability in ourselves, and in all creation, as in the events and happenings of recent years, can become a source of strength, with the capacity to unleash hidden potential and possibility. These destructive events can be seen as labour pains of a deeper wider birthing than we could ever dream or imagine as we slowly, painstakingly transform the world through Christ-conscious activity. We become healers where we can heal. We pour out compassion and love in prayer and action wherever they are called forth in our day-to-day encounters. When we gather with others to pray and intend all of this in communal contemplation then the power of the Ground is strengthened and expanded, becoming a morphogenic field⁵ where more and more people and all creation can belong and evolve further.

Let us begin another year intent on this purpose...together!

⁴ Metallic Figurine of Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus.

GraphicStock.com Royalty Free License held by Ann-Maree O'Beirne RSM.

⁵ Cannato, J. (2010). *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life*. Ave Maria Press. Pp. 6-7.