

GOD WANTS TO BE SOUGHT

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We possess a blindness that impedes our ability to see ourselves as God sees us. To break through this

dilemma, we must faithfully seek out what lies just beyond our vista.

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In his spiritual and apologetic classic *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis expounds on the most profound mystery of the Christian faith in an unlikely way: he tells the story of the 'obstinate soldier'—a story that might not be described as particularly seasonal, but which nevertheless has a Christmassy punch line:

The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God ... Did you ever think, when you were a child, what fun it would be if your toys could come to life? Well suppose you could really have brought them to life. Imagine turning a tin soldier into a real little man. It would involve turning the tin into flesh. And suppose the tin soldier did not like it. He is not interested in flesh; all he sees is that the tin is being spoilt. He thinks you are killing him. He will do everything he can to prevent you. He will not be made into a man if he can help it.

In this brief metaphorical reflection, Lewis explores the predicament of the man who does not want the 'better' version of himself because his limited goals and failure of imagination do not allow him to envision what the 'better' would look like. We who live within the sights of the techno-dreams of billionaires, with their transhumanist aspirations, are today's tin men, trapped in a perception of ourselves that makes us recoil from the image of the actual people we are called to be.

The human race wants to remain in its small world because it is the best one imaginable,

from an anthropological and humanist vantage point. In Lewis' analysis, he mourns this blindness as a lack of magnanimity, essentially originating from a mistrust of God.

Lewis' analogy of the tin man is a reflection of a type of blindness that impedes our ability to see ourselves as God sees us. To break through this dilemma, we must be faithful to our duty to seek out what lies just beyond our vista.

There is another moral lesson, a complement to Lewis' tin man, to be found in an unpublished Christmas sermon from 1980 by the then-archbishop Joseph Ratzinger. Here, the prelate tells a story that also has a veiled significance for Christmas, a story of a Rabbi and his grandson:

Jehel, a little boy, ran crying to his grandfather, the famous Rabbi Baruch. Great tears rolled down his cheeks. And he lamented, "My friend has abandoned me completely. He is very unjust and very unkind to me." Yes—replied the wise Rabbi—can't you explain this to me in more detail? The little one went on: "We were playing hide and seek. And I hid so well that the other one couldn't find me. But then he just stopped looking for me and went away. Isn't that nasty?"

The most perfect hiding place had lost its charm for the little boy because his friend broke off the game. What seemed like a victory turned out to be a failure.

The Rabbi went on to caress the cheek, writes Lewis. Tears came to his own eyes. And he said:

Yes, that is very nasty. And you see, it is the same with God. He has hidden himself, and we don't look for him. Just think, God is hiding and we humans are not even looking for Him.

The archbishop interprets the vignette as a reflection of the Incarnation: “In this little story, a Christian can find the whole mystery of Christmas unfolded.” In other words, God is hiding in the same way that a friend hides in a game of hide and seek, as one who is present and, since He is bound by the rules of the game, available to us provided we carry out on our end our duty to seek Him out. He waits for the creature to set out and go looking for Him.

At that first Christmas under the stars in Bethlehem, the creature—through the aid of various signs, scripture, and Old Testament prophets—received the greatest gift: God himself in a manger.

The mystery of Christmas, the mystery of the incarnate God which is now upon us, reminds us once more of a valuable life lesson: the fullness of God is hidden from us in order *to be found*. Thereby, he turns the world into the largest, most magnificent game of hide-and-seek. And he does so in a way that fits our capacities and dispositions, just like when we receive a baby into our arms, we lower ourselves so that the little one can be lifted up.