

Blog post by John Eldredge, later removed for causing 'offence':

Christmas 2020—a Confession and Prayer

December 26, 2020

What a very difficult year we have suffered.

The sudden onset of the pandemic hit us like a wave that slams from behind while you are looking the other direction, throwing you down and knocking the wind out of you. And with this global shock, all that rushed into the world behind it—the deep-seated, far-beyond-reason fear, gripping the world like a child who has lost its parents in a crowd. Upon that, thanks to that, the draconian, sweeping quarantines, something out of the Nazi occupation of Europe, sending the entire world to be locked up in their homes. Followed by constant uncertainty and foreboding, fueled by daily news of the body count in Rome, Paris, London and the far corners of the earth, predicting the death of millions. The invasion we could not understand but felt at every turn then erupted in riots, followed by devastating wildfires. Upon all this, in the midst of all this, we struggled to find leadership in a presidential race so divisive it smelled of the dark rancor of the Civil War, and may in fact have been the spiritual heir of it.

Meanwhile, in our daily lives, we suffered suddenly and unpredictably the loss of so many of our plans, our hopes for the year, including the loss of so many simple joys that make life good and worth living.

Into this shaken, reeling world the kingdom of darkness, hyena-like, seized every opportunity, rushing in with Fear, Hatred, Death, and now Desolation.

This has been our year, and it feels woefully inadequate to say this has been hard on the soul.

But it is critical we say so, as clearly as we can, because until we name what this has actually been like, and what it has done to us, we cannot mend its effects.

I don't think we have named what it has been like to go out into our neighborhoods, grocery stores and communities to find every human face hidden behind a mask. It is eerie beyond telling. Prior to this, masks were only worn by kidnappers and terrorists, and this is what the psyche associates with a masked face. We do not assume warm smiles and playful benevolence behind those coverings; the deep psyche experiences every masked face as a veiled threat, and a world of masked faces as something like an invasion, a conquered people, mass oppression. Add to this the muting effect of the mask; every human voice has been gagged. The soul reels, for to lose the face and voice is to lose the humanity of a person, the Imago Dei. As scripture says, "Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice" (Songs 2:14). That we all, "with unveiled faces, reflect the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18).

Masking and gagging humanity is utterly demonic, something out of science fiction, or some evil regime. To see it done on a global level is simply traumatizing to the soul.

This has been our daily, and when we name the psychological and spiritual realities, we can say now that we who have lived through 2020 have lived in a world at war. Going on nine months now, with no clear end in sight. No clear vision of what victory might mean, when or how it will come.

By naming this, we expose it, and we begin to undo the harm.

We celebrate Christmas 2020 like our grandparents did during WWII, or our great grandparents during WWI. Better still, like soldiers at the front, or the French resistance gathered in a cellar.

And we do celebrate, joyfully, defiantly, proclaiming the faithfulness and greatness of our God. We sing the carols like battle cries, renaming for ourselves all that Christmas means.

There are so many gifts and mysteries to explore at Christmas time, but I feel the great gift to us this year in the Christ child is found in the depths of his humanity—for it is our humanity he came to rescue and restore, and it is our humanity that has taken the worst beating of this war.

To quote Athanasius,

What was God to do in face of this dehumanizing of mankind, this universal hiding of the knowledge of himself by the wiles of evil spirits? What else could he possibly do, being God, but renew his image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know him? And how

could this be done save by the coming of the very Image himself, our Savior Jesus Christ? The Word of God came in his own Person, because it was he alone, the Image of the Father, who could recreate man made after the Image.

The book of Hebrews assures us,

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14)

Let us gaze for a moment into the lamp-lit shed, where Joseph and Mary huddle over a feeding trough, the son of God—the Son of Man—wrapped in whatever shawl and blanket were available. Let us join the shepherds as they peer in, leaning over stalls to marvel at the humanity that was nearly incomprehensible to the angels, who also gazed in wonder. This humanity is the gift, his gift to us, for in his humanity we find the healing of our own. Our recreation.

Thinking back on that first Christmas night, Chesterton said,

There is a peculiar character about the hold of this story on human nature; it is not at all like a legend or the life of a great man. It does not exactly work outwards, adventurously, to the Wonders to be found at the ends of the Earth. It is rather something that surprises us from behind, from the hidden and personal part of our being; like that which can sometimes take us off guard in the pathos of small objects or the blind pieties of the poor. It is rather as if a man found an inner room in the very heart of his own house, which he had never suspected; and seen a light from within. It is as if he found something at the back of his own heart that drew him into good. The kings fade into a far country and the mountains resound no more with the feet of the shepherds, and only night and the cavern lie in fold upon fold over something more human than humanity.

That something, this inestimable gift, is his Humanity, taking into himself and raising with himself our own humanity. This is the Christmas message; this is our victory, even in such a year as this.

So let us receive it, embrace it; let us pray,

Dearest Jesus, we bring our badly bruised and beaten humanity to you tonight, as our frankincense and myrrh, our gold even, our meager gift in return. That you, our Creator, might renew your image in us by once again, taking and possessing all that is rightly yours, that which you redeemed at great cost, and restore within us our humanity made in your likeness. Unbroken, unblemished, unveiled, with free voices lifting up your praise. Lift from us the heavy burdens of this war—physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually. Let your risen, radiant, incorruptible humanity, filled with the glory of your Father, come into our racked humanity, breathing glory into every corner of our weary being. We receive the gift of the Christ child; we receive your humanity as our greatest treasure, the ransom and restoration of our humanity, working from the inside out as you take your rightful place at the center of our being. Come to us again Lord, come into the dark and barely lit places in our own being. Light of the world, dawn again in us. Defy the world, and mock your enemy, by bringing us forth from Christmas as a renewed creation, our humanity no longer veiled nor muted, but radiating the glory of God. In the name of the Son of Man, Jesus of Bethlehem we pray.