

Christmas is cosmic D-Day, that violent hopeful moment when the war turned in God's redemption of Man; that moment when the light surged upon the pages of our hopes and forced the shadows of our fears into full retreat. What we remember as in the past, was not always in the past already written into the pages of Man's experience, but for much of time was still a mysterious promise, a hope hidden, an unknown undoing of Eden's curse. It was the promise of the Dragon-Slayer, the Seed of the woman whom, in the ancient promise, was foretold to crush the Serpent's head; of the Promise-Keeper, the son of Abraham whom would receive and give the blessings of God to those from every nation; the King of Light, the son of David whom would rule victorious over evil on an eternal throne to protect and provide for His people in absolute security; the Divine Joy-Bringer, the Son of God, who would draw His people into the very glorious ring of fellowship, love, righteousness, and joy within the eternal God by His grace. We are blessed to see His advent already written upon the pages of history, the story of God's doings with Man.

But, what if you were born before the arrival of the Dragon-Slayer? What if all you heard were whispers of His coming and of a time of blessing once believed, but now thought lost? What if D-Day had never happened and the Dragon still roamed the countryside, full of fire and fearsome bellows of taunting terror? What if the Hero had not arrived on these bloodied shores, but rather chose to remain on the far shores of the Fair Havens?

Sometimes I don't appreciate the marvelous blessings of God because I am too familiar with them. Or, at least, I perceive them to be familiar, so near and present that I do not see them, really see their beauty, and thus don't marvel at their awesome weightiness and glorious eternal significance. In reality, I'm probably not familiar enough with them to feel such substantive presence. Recently, I was engaged, in the arena of my mind, upon a battle so ferocious within my

soul that I despaired of life, seared by the fiery darts from the Dragon's lying bow-string, overcome by the terrible possibility of losing the ones whom I hold most dearly in this world. In the tumult of his tremors, my faith failed. I ceased to see. It was a fearsome anxiety of overwhelming force of which I had never experienced nor foreseen; a blitzkrieg of panic washed over me and completely dominated my soul but for the Holy Spirit's sure grip upon me when my grip of Him was shaken by the Enemy's blow. It was a dreadful day of austere loneliness that, though fantastical, haunted my thoughts in the burned out battlefield of my mind with this singular darkness: What if you were rejected and alone? In that moment, through the blurred vision of fear and anger, I was deceived and fell prey to the Lie, and I *felt* alone. I *knew* the cold darkness and the expulsion of desire that lapped up the last of my hope and left my soul naked and shattered. Fear deceives to ruin when unrestrained. Now, I would hope that our Lord does not see such battles fit for you, but I will tell you this: I wouldn't trade this sparring for the world, for it brought me back to reality, to an acknowledgment of the depths of darkness which spring forth within me and the greatness of His glorious grace towards me in spite of my own powerlessness and capacity to hate all that is good. It revealed to me the beauty of the blessings of God, for in the darkest of nights the glories of the heavens shine brighter and more beautiful to our vision. It's not that the stars had changed, but my vision has changed! When the Lord's light broke through my dark travails, I beheld His light in renewed wonder and awe. When the battle is won, one appreciates the joys of rest, of bread and wine, of peace. He led me through the valley to show me His glorious heights are much higher and glorious than I had previously thought. So, I rejoiced! And my expressions of joy, gratitude, and songs of love are growing again, fertilized by darkness and the light of Christ.

So, what does this have to do with Christmas? Have you pondered what your life would be like if the Triune God had not sent the Dragon-Slayer? What if the Promise-Keeper had never promised, the Son of Abraham silenced in Ur? What if David's rule was the last chapter, a family and realm divided in dysfunction? What if God had said throughout the Story, "Well, you're on your own."? What loneliness would compare to this? What hell hath swallowed up the one who knows not the presence of God? We shall never know the "good news of great joy which will be for all the people" if we fail to comprehend or forget the frailties of our front lines in this cosmic battle for the hearts of men. When forgotten, we take the glory of Bethlehem for granted and profane the providence of the promised Dragon-Slayer who shines into the deep darkness of our hearts and our experiences to give us hope as the dawn breaks upon us.

Christmas is a war story; the chapter where the Hero greets the pages with fulfillment's filial hope. The hearts of men had waned and wandered, and left to ourselves, we were overcome, but for the Hero sent from the ages, determined by God and determined for God to rescue the girl from her delighting ruin and slay the Dragon who held her in his sway. The Lion who reigns with fearsome power has been born, but He enters the story not with the roar of expectant war, but with the cry of an infant's abrupt expulsion into the dust. Glorious eternity birthed between a humble girl's knees. The Lion, so powerful in His splendor, is also the Lamb slain before the foundations of the earth. Hell furiously took up arms at the advent of Christ Jesus, born into the dust which He created, and Jesus delivered death over to destruction by becoming destroyed for us. The Dragon raged and tries to swallow Him up, but in the swallowing was pierced from within.

Remember this on Christmas Day, when the kitschy collections of our joyful décor threaten to hide the glorious grandeur of the begetting-begotten-God. He is the Hero of His own story, the

Slayer of the Dragon and the Savior of the working girl that He might love her forever and that she might savor Him for all eternity. He loves her. He adores her. He cherishes her to such an extent that the Son of God was born where He knew He would find us: with the animals, outside the home, rejected and alone. God did not reject her, but came her to die like a Man that he might destroy the Dragon's greatest weapon, death, and bring us into His house. So this advent we recall the darkness into which Christ Jesus was born and we rejoice with even greater joy at His advent at which point the war turned to hope and to victory. For D-Day was brought forth from the virgin's womb, and V-Day burst forth from the darkness of the tomb, and the Wedding party will break out with the Hero's return. This Hero of the War of the Ages, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Father of Eternity, the Prince of Peace, has brought the darkness of our warfare to the irradiant expectancy of a banquet fit for a King and His beloved in white who had mourned in lonely exile here until the Son of God appeared. We rejoice with Isaiah, for the Hero has arrived!

**Isaiah 40:1-5** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup> A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isa 40:1 ESV)