

*“ This grand show is eternal’ he had written on one of his unnumbered and undated scraps.” It is always sunrise somewhere; the dew is never dried all at once; a shower is forever falling; vapour is ever rising . Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset, eternal dawn and gloaming, on sea and continents and islands, each in its turn as the round earth rolls.” ( Page 347 John Muir by Frederick Turner)*

This is the great naturalist and solitary explorer John Muir and a quote used by his biographer Frederick Turner to explain his final days when he rallied from a long period of anxiety and depression and was able at last or once again to relax into earth’s forever passing from light to darkness to light again, in short to die peacefully in the expectation of life to come, to find death indeed a blessing. This may seem a sombré note to begin a new year with- a celebration of death on the day we roll into a time of new life, lengthening days, the birth of a child but it’s all one and so the blessing is there for all, this passing from life to death to life again. This relaxing into the roll of the world could be seen as a metaphor for Mary’s acceptance of God’s word and will in the message of the angel at the annunciation and at the visit of the shepherds and their angelic words today

*‘Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord’*

Words no less puzzling for Mary than those at the Annunciation, which she now treasures and ponders in her heart. As we do when we too enter this realm of blessing, of finding ourselves blessed in the presence of others. A young couple came to me the other day to ask for a blessing at their marriage but really it’s a blessing they are already conferring on one another, and inviting others into, as with the birth of a child. This is not to exclude God from the process but to recognise that God is already at the beginning and end of all blessing, and is indeed that blessing made manifest in the turn of our lives from life to death to life again. When we pray for the Lord to uncover his face and bring peace we are asking for this insight into how things already are – full of blessing, fully within our remit as human beings, there for us each to practise on one another, to be that blessing , that love which God gives unceasingly through us.

There are many other technical words which we could introduce at this point such as grace and communion and a whole library of commentary which then follows but let’s stay with the wonder of it all which we already confer on one another and which the whole world too can convey: those moments of deep joy which we want to be part of and can mark not only the great turning points of our lives but the detail of every moment in which we pass from life to death to life again. Eternity is a flower, as Blake so beautifully put it, and now Frederick Turner once more uses John Muir’s own words to summarise his acceptance of death and all its wonder.

*“ His retirement from the world for the wilderness” he said,“ was no solemn abjuration of the world, I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.” (page 350)*

And we are all children of God in this respect.

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