

Spirit moments in snow full of diamonds

Story of birth of Jesus is retold
so that it can be lived

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"Redemption rips through the surface of time in the cry of a tiny babe." — Bruce Cockburn

People who hear a ring of truth in Bruce Cockburn's song line have at some point in their lives been captivated by the "Christmas story." For those still held by it, Jesus' birth is, in the first place, a contemporary story — stretching back in history.

Christians embarrassed or dismayed to find that the events surrounding Jesus Christ's birth may have certain similarities to ancient Egyptian myths that predate Christ, are Christians for whom the Christmas story is primarily historical. And Christians who view the story as principally historical are doomed to finally reject its history.

At the same time Christians for whom the story is non-historical, that is, mere metaphor or merely myth, are eventually doomed to reject the metaphor and the "mythical" that can reveal truth.

But those for whom the Christian story of God's entrance into humanity is mystery and possibility, metaphor and history, the story remains ever alive and life-directing.

Christians who live the story don't feel compelled to defend its history. Its history is understood. The story is "existentially verified." And when lived, not perfectly but genuinely, it is often understood by others.

While my own long journey of faith has taken on

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a shape that bears slim resemblance to my fundamentalist Sunday school upbringing, the Christmas story still underpins my daily life.

I was six years old when I was struck by the drama and beauty and mystery of the story. It was after a Christmas Eve pageant complete with stogie kids in terry-towel head gear and bath robes, girls in white dresses holding wire halos in place, and a plastic baby in a basket.

It had been a grey evening in our small Saskatchewan village, but when we left the church the sky had cleared. Now flecks of stars and a gibbous moon cast a slant of silvery light on a fresh fall of snow.

I walked hand in hand with my older sister and as we moved out from beneath the glow of a street light we were suddenly ankle deep in diamonds. And then, just as suddenly, we were the wise men following the star, we were the shepherds beholding the angel. We were Joseph, filled with anticipation.

The story I had just seen, awkwardly acted by kids I knew, sealed itself within me through the wordless speech of that night. I was embraced someplace deep within and awakened to a big new

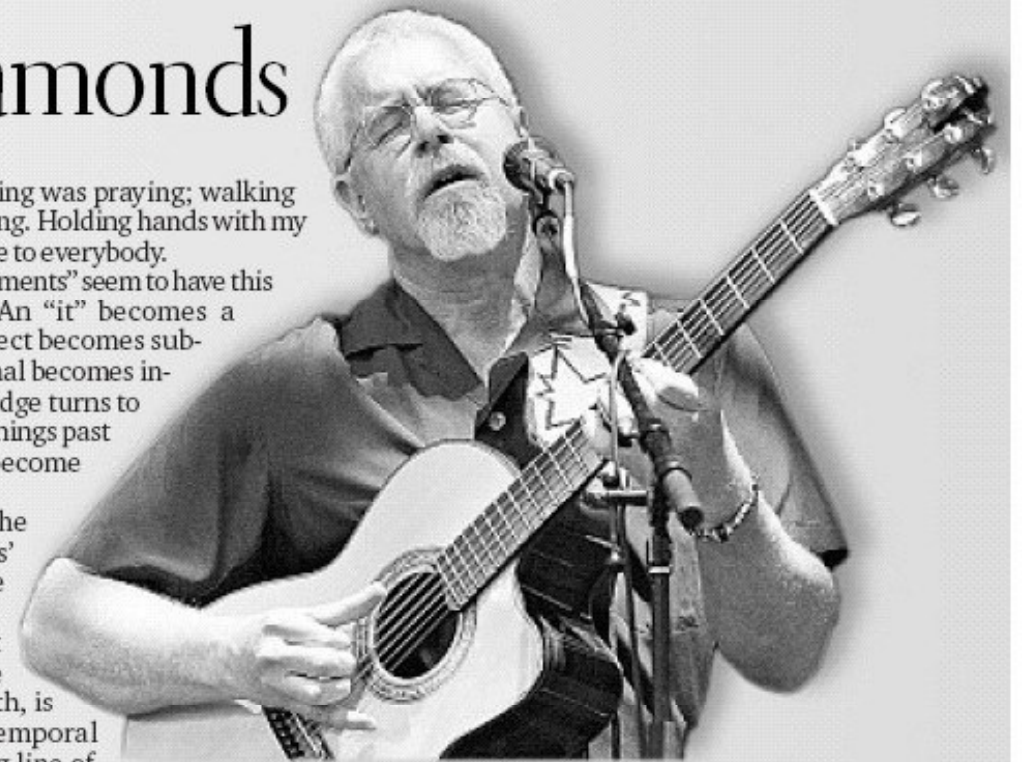
reality. Breathing was praying; walking was worshipping. Holding hands with my sister linked me to everybody.

All "Spirit moments" seem to have this in common: An "it" becomes a "thou," an object becomes subject, the external becomes internal, knowledge turns to knowing and things past and future become "now."

This is why the story of Jesus' birth, for those who have internalized it through the journey of faith, is no longer a temporal event in a long line of past events; it is a central event. It is a story that, as Cockburn says, "rips through the surface of time," bringing with it the promise of reorienting and renewing everything it touches as it travels in ever-widening circles.

But this story, like any story, can be forgotten. For it to become an organic part of a life it needs the oxygen of a remembering community. Through telling, it is raised to the surface and brought into the present. It is told so that it can be lived.

I learned of its central importance as it was told and retold in the church community where I was faithfully taken. But more importantly, as the story was retold in my family, I saw its loving effect



CANADIAN PRESS, FILE

Bruce Cockburn performing at the Live 8 concert in Ontario

in the lives of my parents. Before it became the cornerstone of my story I saw it as a "lived story" of people around me.

And it's the "lived story" of gratuitous love that counts. It's this story that still — even in our currently confused mercantile Christmas — makes room for human transformations. When your story is touched by this gift of love, all things are new. The snow is full of diamonds.

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