

Meditation: I Always Had to Carry the Myrrh
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Blue Christmas 2021

Please hear the words of this poem by Cheryl Kristolaitis:

I Always Had to Carry the Myrrh

Not for me the glitter of gold,
nor the gummy fragrance of frankincense.
Those great and glorious gifts
that spoke of royalty and worship, dignity and adoration,
were carried by others deemed more worthy of their glory.
I always had to carry the myrrh,
reluctant bearer of an unwelcome gift.
I had heard the hymn often enough.
I knew what its bitter perfume meant.
"Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb."
It was as if I pierced the joy of every Christmas pageant
with the desolation of Good Friday,
dragging my feet up the aisle,
sure no one wanted my gift to be given.
Decades have passed since I last crossed that stage.
The years have taught me the richness of that gift.
To enter suffering knowing it will bend but not break you,
silence the body but not the soul,
is to rob it of its pain
and to release its power.

If I were to carry the myrrh once again,
I would not skulk my way to the Christ child.
No, I would carry it as the precious gift it is --
the bittersweet fragrance of life itself.

This poem brings to mind our tendency to, especially at Christmastime, separate the birth of our Savior from his death. The writer offers her reflection of what she felt as a child at the idea of carrying the burial or embalming oil that was a gift of the magi—the fragrant reminder of death—when everyone else was so jubilant at their parts in the Christmas pageant. As an adult, however, with a fuller understanding of the Christ's victory over death—a release of the power that fear holds over us—she reconsiders what a precious gift that myrrh really is. The myrrh does not come alone—it is not the symbol of death that is given by itself, but also frankincense, the symbol of deity and gold, the symbol of kingship that it came with.

This time of year can be unbelievably hard. We are human beings living in a world that is fragmented, imperfect, far from the kingdom God has planned. We know brokenness. We know pain. We know darkness, just as Mary and Joseph did. Just as the people of Herrod's kingdom and all of Rome. We know, as they did, that the world as it should be is not the world as it is.

Given our life experience, we couldn't be faulted for skulking toward Christmas day. But, just as the poet realizes the holy worth of the myrrh, just Matthew's gospel lifts up the blessedness of the least among us, we, too must remember that the stings of our bleakest nights cannot overwhelm the precious gift that is the Light of the World, in Christ Jesus. The incarnation isn't just another birthday to celebrate, it is the inbreaking of the

glowing triumph of life over death. Hope over despair. Joy over sadness. But to get to the light, even God incarnate among us had to walk through the depths of night. What we do know, however, is that having walked through that darkness, God will never abandon us in it. God is with us now and always. In the cheer of the season and in our pain. Amen.