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CHRISTMAS EVE--A DARK STORY

12/27/92

We come together as humans have done throughout their existence. Our forebears huddled together in their caves in the dark—groping, stumbling, anxiously awaiting the coming of a light which gave warmth and safety. Fire gave them courage, banishing a small circle of the dark. Predators feared the fire and lurked outside its range. Even today we fear the dark, that shroud of evil and portent of danger.

In the absolute darkness of caves, our eyes constantly strive to adjust, to pierce the pitch. Light receptors, they seek what is not there; they long for the comfort of an image.

Gather in the darkness in this time which is the year's darkest. Dark seems to conquer the light. The days shorten minute by minute. The cold of winter officially arrives. It seems that the darkness will eventually win, that cold will lock the world in its embrace, and that we will remain huddled in our small group without hope.

Those who speak to us of "near death experiences" have one constant. They see a light, they move toward light and warmth. Scoffers say that merely reflects our birth, when we move from the darkness of the womb to the world's light.

Despite the scoffers, mankind has forever held to the light as hope against the darkness. Druids and other pagans celebrated the winter solstice as the change point, as the time when, despite appearances, the light began to win its battle against darkness. Holly and pine promised that dark and cold could not kill all. The Yule Log, burning through the night, symbolized the light's

victory. The Jews in Channaka celebrate the Festival of Lights, which commemorates—at the same season—the miracle of light. The story of one night’s oil fueling the temple lamp for eight is retold and celebrated, along with the Passover meal.

Christians join pagans and Jews in the season and its celebration. Light displays, tree lights, candles in windows—all these use light to combat the darkness. Wittingly or no, they rely upon John’s conception of the Christ. John opens his gospel with “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” (1:1-9) It is John who quotes Jesus telling the scribes and Pharisees “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (8:12) It is John who has Jesus warning his disciples just before the Last Supper, “For a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light.” (12:35-6) Summing up his testimony in one of those little books near the New Testament’s end, John wrote “And this is the message we have heard from Him and

announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7)

So let us wait in the darkness, awaiting the coming of the light of both the new day’s sun and God’s Son. So let us look forward to the commemoration of that long-ago birth and dawn.

Ray Granada