



The winter solstice marks the longest night and the deepest dark of the year. The appearances of vitality have fallen away. The flowers, the butterflies, the song-birds, the budding leaves and blossoming trees are all manifestations of what is now slumbering in the dark. Do we need faith or hope to *know* that this is womb time? To know that life is gestating under the surface, hidden from our senses? There is a rhythm to life that includes death, that includes birth, and both take us into the dark.

I have a love affair with the light. I think all life does. Light allows me to *appear*. But without the dark, without the sheltering womb, without the *Mystery* that is dark to my senses and to my questing, questioning mind, there is no manifestation, no birth or rebirth.

This brings to mind what science calls Dark Matter:

(This is) unseen matter that may make up more than ninety percent of the universe. As the name implies, dark matter does not interact with light or other electromagnetic radiation, so it cannot be seen directly, but it can be detected by measuring its gravitational effects. It is believed that dark matter was instrumental in forming galaxies early in the Big Bang. [1]

Just as our evolving knowledge shifted the belief that the earth was the center of the universe, this mysterious evidence of Dark Matter also changes how we see ourselves and our place in the universe. Dark Matter seems to be everywhere. It gives a contemporary expression to an ancient definition of God: *a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere*. Within this maternal womb, whose center is everywhere, particles, suns and galaxies are gestated. We begin to appreciate that *light* is a rare and precious birth.

And then there is Christmas. We move from the universal to the concrete; from the cosmic womb, to Mary's womb; from the Mystery that births the Heavens to the Mystery that gives birth to a child. We recognize within this human birth the spark of divinity. In the Christian Scriptures the story of this birth is related as a cosmic event. Kings and astrologers have been directed to this birth place by observing the movement of the heavens. We accompany this particular incarnation on the journey from divine spark to the fullness of light in human form. He is a radiant center. Each of us has at our core the potential of such radiance. After all, the star that showed the way to Bethlehem is woven into our blood and bone. And what has been realized in one of us is possible for all of us. Ours too is a cosmic birth. This Christmas story is one religious-cultural doorway into both the mystery and the revelation of our human calling.

This calling is beautifully articulated in this poem by Christopher Fry. I give the last word of this reflection to him.

*The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now.
The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move,
The thunder is the thunder of the flows,
The thaws, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us til we take
The longest stride of soul one ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.*

(Christopher Fry, The Sleep of Prisoners)

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¹ The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition
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