

Wild Lectionary:
Choosing the True Mystery
Renouncing Santa in the Kingdom of Consumerism

Advent 4A

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80:1-17, 17-19

Romans 1:1-7

By Lanni Lantto

Isaiah was a prophet in times of kings. In the lectionary passage, God sends him to Ahaz, a king defending his earthy kingdom, to say that God will send a sign, a young child named Immanuel meaning *God is with us*. This child, from a very young age, will know how to, “*refuse the evil and choose the good.*” For Ahaz, who may have felt powerless in his situation, this message was meant to give him hope for a time of peace and restoration.

I never grew up in a monarchy or kingdom, but I perceive in them fear of chaos and the need to have order, run by people who hold great power: the power and means to persuade, force, or control. Yet, in a culture that gives me great freedoms, why do I still feel elements of subjectivity and powerlessness in my life?

The culture in which I live has become my King whose kingdom is run by corporations and public relation armies demanding loyalty and servitude. I grew up with this specifically American version: the mystery and excitement that a child experiences on December 25th is wrapped up in paper and bows under a cut down tree in your living room. The lead-up to that moment includes driving to big box stores, swiping a credit card, magazines with pages of shiny toys in the mailbox, and email upon email of advertisements. The way of this world is utterly deceptive in its allurements of my heart and mind.

Disney has done a great job of creating fantasy kingdoms for our children, in fact they have become an icon of American culture promoting childhood innocence and wholesome entertainment. They’ve transformed children into lifetime consumers of their products and ideas while at the same time being absolutely impenetrable to criticism. Try telling a family member why you don’t want them buying Mickey Mouse pajamas for your child- I can tell you that it’s just as hard telling them why you don’t want the Santa version. Societal pressure says that telling your child at age three that Santa is a story and not real means depriving that child of excitement and mystery. When did Cinderella and Santa Clause become more real, more awe-giving, more mysterious than the coming of Christ?

Our modern day icons draw our hearts’ attention away from holiness, from God. They are rooted in a “mystery” that enslaves us to cutting down trees to create advertisements,

to putting up lights that feed the power companies, to throwing pesticides on cotton to create clothes we don't need, to killing 46 million turkeys "in thanksgiving," to mining petroleum to make plastic trees or cutting down breathing ecosystems to enjoy for a few days. This "mystery" is surface level, superficial and on a deeper level it is a destroyer of our natural resources and darkens our souls.

Christmas is one of the most mystical times of the year for Christians. The readings tell us why: *because Christ is coming*. Christ was born in poverty, the first to greet him were cows, chickens, and donkeys. He lived his life in service of the other, laying down possessions at the others' feet. In Christ, creation not only provides sustenance but it is a spiritual resource meant to guide us on the path of reverence, of awe, of connection, of humility – the forests are not wrapping paper tossed into the garbage after the excitement is done, the forests are living breathing cathedrals of God's love for us. More precious than the presents under a tree, is the possibility that my son can know the presence of the God who created those trees; that the land he inherits is full of life: birds, coyotes, jack pines, monarch butterflies, bumble bees, streams, and ferns and all things that are good.

When standing up against a culture that casts me out as a bad parent, I feel the words of Psalm 80 resound in my core, "*You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.*" When I find it confusing to figure out how I can "*refuse the evil and choose the good*" this verse from Romans gives a good insight: "*You who are called to be saints.*" Saints! Not "You who are called to be good consumers," or "called to go with the flow," or "be obedient to others' values." Saints!

For me and for all of us who strive to live as Christ has taught us, the path is filled with discomfort, doubt, and even scorn. But if we truly believe that this sign that God has given us is enough mystery, enough love, enough hope, enough charity, and enough wholeness, then we can more easily see the ways of this world for what they are; devoid of the real mystery, excitement, and joy of this season. Let us, who often times feel counter cultural, remain steadfast in resolve and in eager anticipation of a King who brings peace and restoration to not only us, but to all of creation.

Lanni Lantto is a lay leader of [U.P. Wild Church](#) an ecumenical collaboration to awaken the wonder between our faith lives and our natural environment. She lives in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, which is the ancestral unceded land of the Anishinabe people and has a long history and current reality of resource exploitation. Lanni's family immigrated to the shores of Lake Superior (Gichigami) in the early 1900s and she, along with her husband and son, are committed to learning how to be forest protectors for future generations. U.P. Wild Church is part of the [Wild Church Network](#).

Wild Lectionary is a weekly blog on ecological justice themes in the revised common lectionary, curated by Laurel Dykstra, gathering priest of [Salal + Cedar](#), Coast Salish Territory.