

After Christmas, where to go from here?

A Reflection by Brian Wigger

There's a popular folk tale about three blind men who walk around an elephant to determine what kind of beast this animal might be. One takes hold of the elephant's tail and says, "This creature is very like a rope." The second happens to take hold of its tusk and says, "This creature is very like a spear." And the third, patting the wide, hard side of the animal, says, "This creature is surely a wall." Obviously, if any one of them had all three insights at once, these men would have understood a great deal more about elephants than any one of them could possibly know alone.

Liturgical spirituality is a bit like that as well. Each season has a great consuming centerpiece on which we concentrate — Christmas Day or the Resurrection — but it is being willing to walk thoughtfully through all the other parts of each particular cycle that gives us the fuller, truer picture of exactly what the feast itself is all about.

The Christmas season, or Christmastide, is not about one feast day. It is a series of feasts that embed us in a kind of refracted glory, the underpinnings, the other pieces of the mosaic that complete the feast itself.

The feasts of a season create a heightened awareness in us of what the season's major feast is about. They help us to understand the feast from multiple perspectives and various layers of meaning. Together they create a mosaic that fleshes out for us the fullest meaning of the feast. They give us a way of looking at our own world differently because through them we come to see Jesus differently. They provide the hope because of which we can move in the dark parts of the spiritual life with both confidence and conviction.

Christmas — the light that shone upon a manger — was also, the ancients knew, the light that led them on beyond it as well. If God is truly with us, has been manifested among us, companions us as we go, knows our pains and our hopes, then life is not a dark forest from which there is no exit. It is a darkness, however dark, that is always overcome by light.

But how would they know that? How do we know that? We know that because surrounding the feast of Christmas are the feasts that open up to us the real nature of this child whom, with the shepherds, we have come to realize lives with us, in us, as much today as yesterday. These minor feasts of Christmastide which we have celebrated give us a great deal more than a manger. They give us, as adults, models to live by if we, too, are to be steeped in Jesus and full of new life.