

An Ode to Joy at Atonement

Robin Hickey

Advent: A new year. Unadorned greenery. An empty crèche. Waiting for the coming. New growth. Another chance for atonement; At-One-Ment with God.

The Sunday before Christmas: So many angels, wise men, the shepherd boy and his sheep, Mary Joseph and the baby Jesus. Hulan's voice proclaiming, "No more room". Christmas bags decorated at High Point Elementary to be filled for Holy Comforter with socks, toothpaste, a calendar, candy. A party at Holy Comforter to deliver them, or better yet, bring Holy Comforter here for handbells, singing, cookies, Santa.

Christmas Eve: Chattering children excited to see Oscar the Mouse, who looks an awful lot like Chris, telling how he was there for Jesus's birth and shared his straw with the baby Jesus. Then quiet. As midnight approaches, in from the dark wafts perfume, chatter. Glittery diamonds, red sweaters. Then quiet as Ben tickles the piano keys and like magic glorious hymns sound from the depths of the baby grand. People sing with gladness and singleness of heart. Then, lights dim, candles are lit, and the Silent Holy Night takes hold again.

Epiphany: How many pigs have Art and his brigade roasted for our Epiphany feast? Stories shared throughout the night around red warming coals by people as they come and go, tending the coals and let's not forget the pig, fanning the memories of fun times and hard times, gathered over the years during which we have shared the Host.

Lent: Wednesday night. Soup: sometimes shrimp bisque from Bill. A lesson. A labyrinth cut in grass over the pipeline, or later laid out in the parish hall. Drums beating in the wilderness. Denial. Growth. Waiting. No foot washing though.

Good Friday: Stations of the cross. Inside, crosses made by congregants. Red cross with black nails. Embroidered. Painted. Pictures colored by Sandy Springs mission. Outside, through the woods and along the trails that Bill built.

Easter: Purple, pink, blue, yellow, orange, white. Eggs, eggs, eggs litter the playground. Children in Easter bonnets and bow ties, pictures snapped by Charlie. An Easter feast. Children running around the Parish Hall on a sugar high only the Easter bunny can appreciate.

Pentecost: I forgot to wear red. But the Holy Spirit will still descend I am assured. Another feast? Why not? Maybe a fish fry!

Ordinary times? Not so ordinary.

From Bill's sculpture garden, we learn that a little girl can sit down with a turtle and remove a thorn from a bear's paw. They are not so different. She understands his pain. A lamb can lie down with a lion. A mother pelican can love so much, she gives her last ounce of blood to her young. Bible stories brought to life by Bill. Inside, an art gallery. Swaths of color or pastoral scenes. A picture window with a cross. God's painting, changing with each season. A bird perched to rest as we too rest inside. Illuminated pages. We can all be artists of the Word.

A trip to Camp Mikell. Hikes. Do-si-do-ing. Stargazing in the lower field. How many shooting stars that night? We believe in one God, maker of heaven and earth. Grabbing flashlights to follow the light through darkness back to shelter for the night.

An afternoon at the Pastures, hitting and ducking golf balls. Balls landing in cow paddies.

Vacation Bible School. Lessons taught through Judy's songs the children and counselors will never forget. Love your God with all your heart and soul, with all your strength and all your mind. Love your neighbor as you love yourself and you will follow God's commands. Hit, clap. hey.

Men's, now Monday Night, Supper Group. Tuesday breakfasts. In home supper groups. Mothers supporting one another.

The Gleaner's Garden built by a neighborhood Eagle scout and blessed by Ruth. The Walk of Wisdom, where yesterday is history and tomorrow a "mystery". The Church of the Woods. The memorial garden, a place where many friends have chosen to bury their ashes and sometimes those of their pets with them.

Speaking of pets, Dogs in pews each second Sunday. Receiving blessings and biscuits.

Ralph's signup sheets and stewardship posters. Congregants sharing their stories of faith.

Cans and cans and cans of food brought to the altar. Sorted into bags. Chickens. Delivered from the back of Kathleen's Volvo station wagon. Kathleen's cries of joy at seeing how much food to share.

Caring and Sharing. Toys. Some new some old. Flea markets. \$1 per bag. Cookies and more cookies baked for the troops.

Babbling: in English, French, Spanish, Hebrew.

Eager Wood, Pat Sanders, John Brewster, Joan Pritcher, Trawin Malone, Chris Starr, Lang Lowrey, Ruth Pattison, Peter Wallace, Rich Sanders. First is the woods, then the Church, and we come and go like sand through a bigger than, 500,000-hour hourglass. Beginning and ending with sanders.

Advent again. An ending. And a beginning.