

## Defeating December Doldrums

It's December. The days are getting shorter and shorter, sending people with Seasonal Affective Disorder rummaging for their sun lamps to help them out of their depression. Global warming has not stopped the cold fronts from marching their way down from Canada, chilling the air, turning the sky leaden gray, and bringing in whistling winds which snatch the last gaily-colored leaves from the bleak skeletons of trees. Seeking refuge in stores desperate for the dollars which the failing economy has made more precious, we are driven to the edge by blinking lights and canned carols. Fa-la-la!

Among the ditties invading our consciousness is one whose message has become surprisingly poignant. The show Mame offers us a meditation for the season:

We need a little Christmas, right this very minute...  
For I've grown a little leaner,  
Grown a little colder,  
Grown a little sadder,  
Grown a little older,  
And I need a little angel  
Sitting on my shoulder,  
Need a little Christmas now!

True confessions time: this song describes my current state of mind. After all the venom spewed in the recent elections, after the scary roller coaster ride to which Wall Street has treated us all, I'd be surprised if I were alone in my funk. I join the psalmist in his lament: "How long, Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? (Psalm 89:47)" Yup, I need that little angel to give me a boost. Of course, if an angel really did suddenly appear to me, I'd probably get scared half to death; besides, the feathers would probably make me sneeze. Maybe the Lord could think up a different messenger to send...

The problem is that God's messengers often come masquerading in the incongruous, in the unexpected. In this month, I am reminded of the festival so dear to our Hispanic neighbors – namely, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Who could blame the Spanish bishop of Mexico City, representative of the powerful conquerors, for not recognizing God's chosen messenger? After all, the humble Juan Diego, because he belonged to a conquered people, was the lowest of the low. Why would the Mother of God appear to the likes of him? Imagine the bishop's surprise when he beheld in Juan Diego's *serape* the double sign given to him by the Lady: not only did the garment hold the surprise of fresh roses out of season, but it also revealed an image of the Mother of God in the form of a Native American woman. She had indeed shown God's special love for the poor and oppressed; perhaps the powerful man's surprise was mixed with fear as ancient words jumped out at him from his breviary: "He has shown the strength of His arm. He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. (Luke 1: 51-52)"

Legends tend to be spectacular, whereas our lives tend to be much more mundane. I tend not to expect such extravagant miracles in my life, but I know better than to discount the reality of Divine visitations – albeit on a much smaller scale. Moreover, I suspect that God visits you in the same understated ways.

- Can you recognize Him in the poor who, like the homeless Mary and Joseph, challenge us to proclaim our Christianity with more than just our words?

- Can you recognize Him in those parts of your life which are as cold and dark as the cave of Bethlehem, where He seeks to bring light for your darkness and warmth for your winter?
- Can you recognize Him in those parts of your life which are as beautiful as a virgin mother, as full of hope and promise as her virginal womb?

If you can recognize Him in any of those surprising places, you can join the poet Richard Crashaw in his joyous song of expectant praise:

Welcome, all wonders in one sight,  
Eternity shut in a span,  
Summer in winter, day in night,  
Heaven in earth and God in man!

Fr. Jim Karepin, op