

# Christmas Day 2016

[Isaiah 62: 6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3: 4-8a; Luke 2: \(1-7\) 8-20](#) Vanderbilt Divinity Library

[Christmas Day, 2016](#) from Textweek

I came across a 'meme' on the internet, and for those still resistant to social media and unknowing, a 'meme' is "an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations."

By way of context, in 1920 Robert Frost wrote a poem called "The Road Not Taken", and it finishes with these lines

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Well the meme that I came across had this quote:

I walked on the road less travelled on and now I'm (*f\*\*\*ing*) lost

i walked on the road less  
traveled on and now im f\*\*\*ing  
lost

- Unknown

When we contemplate the Nativity, and then look around us at the whole Christmas celebration in the midst of today's world, it is the meme rather than the poem that seems to describe the journey of humanity since the first Christmas....

There are some very real moments of Christmas in every life and this account from time magazine captures one well known Christmas event:

*"On a crisp, clear morning [over]100 years ago, thousands of British, Belgian and French soldiers put down their rifles, stepped out of their trenches and spent Christmas mingling with their German enemies along the Western front. In the hundred years since, the event has been seen as a kind of miracle, a rare moment of peace just a few months into a war that would eventually claim over 15 million lives."*

Robert Frost's poem speaks of the journey we take and of the reference points we use to decide on the paths we take through life:

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller.....  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And ~~that has made all the difference.~~ Now I'm lost.....

The nativity narrative, the story and its symbols provide us with a poetic, or mystical illustration of Christ's revelation, it gives us a path forward that still remains a road less travelled on.

Every religious tradition has a version of '*Christmas Celebration*' that is so similar to our tradition; and to appreciate the similarities here is a description from 'Wikipedia' of Diwali from the Hindu tradition:

**Diwali** is the Hindu festival of lights celebrated every year in autumn in the northern hemisphere (spring in southern hemisphere). One of the major festivals of Hinduism, it spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair. Its celebration includes millions of lights shining on housetops, outside doors and windows, around temples and other buildings in the communities and countries where it is observed. The festival preparations and rituals typically extend over a five-day period, but the main festival night of Diwali coincides with the darkest, new moon night of the Hindu Lunisolar month Kartika.

Before Diwali night, people clean, renovate, and decorate their homes and offices. On Diwali night, people dress up in new clothes or their best outfit, light up *diyas* (lamps and candles) inside and outside their home, participate in family *puja* (prayers) typically to Lakshmi – the goddess of fertility and prosperity. After *puja*, fireworks follow, then a family feast including *mithai* (sweets), and an exchange of gifts between family members and close friends. Deepavali also marks a major shopping period in nations where it is celebrated.

Obviously Christmas-like celebrations are a valuable and a familiar part of cultural life for all peoples and in fact as we know from our own tradition they mirror in a community context the celebration that we all enjoy once a year, they mirror the celebration of our birthday...

And in the Christian tradition we have the nativity narrative of birth to make explicit and illuminate this mystical community celebration.

However the story of birth is also the point at which *TWO roads diverged*, and somehow we got lost for we really misunderstood the enormity of the story.

So today let's look once again at birthdays and see if we can make sense of the Christmas story in a way that more correctly reflects the intent; and that offers us a path forward that is a road less travelled on, a path into a new understanding that takes us beyond our tradition and every other religious tradition.

The early church took the obvious path; here was a story of a birthday, and so a familiar story.

Think about your birthday, any birthday, and the components of the story, and so too the understanding, is obvious; there is the birthday 'boy' (well this is the church after all) and then there is the birthday gift and on receiving the gift the boy is honoured as being special.

So the obvious reading of the nativity narrative, and its understanding through the centuries has been that Jesus was born, and was being acknowledged as special; so special in fact that he was more special than anyone else as so was given the same title as the then Roman Emperors late father, Son of a God.

A more careful reading of the narrative, especially in light of all that Christ revealed rather than the simple misunderstanding of the early church, and we see a very different story. Jesus is not the 'birthday boy' ..... He is the gift!

That simple understanding will lead us on another journey altogether, and will take us to a road less travelled on; the path of the enlightened, for this is the dawning day of new light. It will take us on a path with only the few footprints of an ancient mystic or two from very diverse traditions, and it will take us beyond the Church and beyond religion into the light of Christ.

Jesus is not the 'birthday boy' ..... He is the gift!

So.... who is the 'birthday boy'... and what about the three kings who brought birthday presents for Jesus....

What the nativity reveals and what Christ teaches is that this is my birthday, your birthday, and our Birthday; the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

There is no Father God in heaven, for the gift the God, the very essence of Divine Love is now enfleshed.

And the 'we three Kings' did not bring birthday gifts to the manger, for Kings have better things to do, and they didn't send gifts via emissaries; no, they brought themselves to the manger.

This is us, humanity coming before this wonderful revelation, and what they carry represents all that we carry, the gold of wealth, the myrrh symbolising our mortality and the frankincense representing our prayer, our deepest and truest desire.

This is a narrative of our birth and of humanity's enlightenment

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Next year I will take this road; for I know within that it will make all the difference; and this Christmas you have the very same invitation, the same choice.

To realise this as your birthday; and more than that to see beyond the Church and see that this is also a birthday for Omran Daqneesh Alan Kurdi and every child that seeks life

Jesus is not the 'birthday boy' ..... He is the gift!

The nativity is a birthday, our birthday and we're the special ones, each and every one.

T.S Eliot's words guided us through Advent, and now they echo loud and clear in this mystical nativity:

If you came this way,  
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,  
At any time or at any season,  
It would always be the same: you would have to put off  
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,  
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity  
Or carry report. You are here to kneel  
Where prayer has been valid.

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well



The child caught in the middle of the Syrian war was identified as five-year-old [Omran Daqneesh](#)...

[Alan Kurdi](#) (Kurdish: Alan Kurdî ), initially reported as Aylan Kurdi, was a three-year-old Syrian boy of Kurdish ethnic background whose image made global headlines after he *drowned* on 2 September 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea. ...

Peter Humphris

