

One mightier than I is coming after me . . .

When we read our Christmas Gospels we find some people who do not welcome Advent – that is, they do not welcome change because change interrupts the comfort level they are used to. Joseph experiences such reluctance. You can't really blame him. When informed that his future bride is already pregnant he recoils. Fears arise like who is the father, what kind of a girl is this Mary. No, rather pull back, retain one's status quo. Certainly King Herod wasn't pleased by the news of the three Wise Men requesting information about a new born King of the Jews. Herod was *already* King of the Jews and would be the first to erase any pretender – to an extreme degree, which he did when he massacred every infant boy recently born in Bethlehem. Why? To prevent change! And how many dictators have erased millions to prevent change or to enforce the *one way* they want things to be?

So while some people welcome Advents, change, new insights, discoveries, revelations, their own personal growth in Being – I would guess most people don't unless it's change that insures their present security, like a constant increase in wealth in as many banks as possible for security's sake. But is one ever secure? And what kind of security does extreme wealth offer in terms of the deeper things of life that leave one secure in a deeper sense so that when *The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. . . it did not fall; [for] it had been set solidly on rock.*

Ebenezer Scrooge is a classic example of someone who hates advents, arrivals of things that might change his comfort zone, even though his office and home quarters are hardly described as comfortable. His nephew invites him to Christmas dinner and Scrooge flies into a rage: *Bah, Humbug!* he says. Charles Dickens says of Scrooge: *Oh! But . . . he was a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! . . . secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.* But advents never cease, moments of surprise, wake up calls we never anticipate. In Scrooge's case it arrives as his old associate Jacob Marley's ghost. Up from the cellar and through the door he clanked bearing a long chain around his waist . . . made of *cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.* Marley declares: *I wear a chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard . . . Chain, cash boxes, keys, padlocks . . . all indicative of a life locked up, impenetrable to advents of grace, inspirations of the Holy Spirit, the enhancement of one's Being, new birth.*

Scrooge experiences other arrivals, advents after this: one from the girl he once wanted to marry but who rejects him because *You fear the world too much . . . I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you.* And may that not be the real reason our modern world worships money, out of some kind of constant terror? Not so St. Peter in today's second reading where he declares: *we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

So be open to advents, arrivals as was Mary. As George Steiner, whom I have quoted before, says: *Again, the shorthand image is that of an Annunciation, of a "terrible beauty" or gravity breaking into the small house of our cautionary being. If we have heard rightly the wing-beat . . . of that visit, the house is no longer habitable in quite the same way as before. A mastering intrusion has shifted the light.*

Geoff Wood