

Allen Pruitt

It is hard to imagine something less possible,
something less likely,
less probable.

It is hard to picture a scene that makes less sense
than the one we celebrate tonight.

Everything is out of place.
Everything is backward
and right side down.

Any way you look at it,
what we celebrate tonight is a miracle.

There is the light in the darkness.
Not the darkness destroyed;
not the darkness ignored.
There is the miracle of the light shining
and the darkness all around.

There is the simple fact that God was born,
born at all.
And then to think that God was born into smelly straw.

There it is.
It is impossible.

And it is the reason that we have any hope at all.

The English poet W.H. Auden wrote an epic poem called "For the Time Being".

It's a retelling of the Christmas story really.
He begins with these words.

*We who must die demand a miracle.
How could the Eternal do a temporal act,
The Infinite become a finite fact?
Nothing can save us that is possible:
We who must die demand a miracle.*

Nothing can save us that is possible.

Nothing likely,
nothing probable.
Nothing *but* a miracle.

And if there is anything less likely,
less possible
than God resting helpless in a feeding trough,
surrounded by cattle and the smell of a barn,
then we have yet to see it.

It is impossible.

And it is the reason that we have any hope at all.

My strongest memories of this night involve waiting in the dark.
Every Christmas Eve,
spent at my grandmother's house,
after the sun was down,
my cousins and I always went outside to play hide and seek.

There were nine of us,
and we played on 7 acres of wood and pasture.

The point of these games was not really to make it back to base.
The point was to never be found.

I remember sitting in the dark,
in the trees,
against a small hill,
watching my breath go up to the starry sky.

I remember seeing all those lights,
shining in the darkness.
No flash lights,
no streetlights.
Nothing but the dark,
and just the faintest light.

A light,
shining in the darkness.

Later in the service,
after some more prayers
and some more carols;
after communion;
we'll each have our own light.
And it will be a little darker in here.

We'll each hold our light,
against the dark.
We'll sing "Silent Night",
and for tonight,
for a moment,
we'll be still
and we'll wait outside
with the shepherds and the angels,

and we'll know what it's like to be found.

Tonight is the way we live.
We live in the darkness.
Holding on to a light.
We celebrate and we make a noise
to shout back the dark.

We were waiting
and now our waiting has ended.
And then we are still again,
quiet for once.
Looking out on the wonder of a God
who will do what it takes
for us simply to live.

It is impossible.

And it is the reason that we have any hope at all.

We who must die demand a miracle.

We have our miracle.

We have our light.

Nothing can save us that is possible.

There is nothing possible about this night.

There is nothing about the life we have
and the love we are given that is possible.

There is nothing possible about this night.

There is nothing possible *without* this night.

This night is the reason that we have any hope at all.