



# Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

When the Son of God comes to earth, “let all mortal flesh keep silence.” We know how to make raucous noise and celebrate to the hilt, but for many of us silence as a response only arrives when we are thrust into an experience beyond our understanding or expectation; when the conversation turns to a complex subject beyond our expertise or experience. When someone tells us they just lost a loved one; when someone is fired from his or her job; when we stand over a grand landscape of nature while the sun is setting; these are the things that silence us.

Rare are the times our hurried culture falls silent.

This hymn transports us back to a time that was both so very different and yet so very similar to our own. In this obscure province of the grand superpower of the day people dealt with political turmoil, economic uncertainty, ever present threats of terrorism from within and without. The people feared that the predominant culture of the day was compromising and corrupting faithfulness to God or was a sure sign that the people were already abandoning their devoutness.

The Son of God was born into this tension. In order for us to experience the awe-filled reverence of sheer silence we must allow ourselves to enter fully into it as well. The liturgical season of Advent is a time where we attempt to slow down and kindle inside ourselves a sense of hope and longing for the coming of God to earth. Could it be that that Advent betrays our own ignorance of our deepest longings? For most of us our credit card bills, rising calorie counts, and over-committed calendars show that we are an anxious people searching for anything that might bring our lives meaning and fullness. We need to heed this hymn’s admonishment to “ponder nothing earthly minded.”

We need the Christ who “will give to all the faithful His own self for heavenly food,” because we have spent our days gorging ourselves at the table of the world. When we see this need we can experience the coming of Christ into the world as the truly unexpected and mysterious act that it was and is and will be again. This experience of the mystery of the incarnation dovetailing with the longings of our heart leads us from reverent silence to jubilant praise. We join with the angelic host to cry out, “Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Lord Most High!”

Perhaps, for our alleluias to be a true reflection of ecstatic acclamation our lives must at times be a reflection of reverent awareness borne out of silence. “Let all mortal flesh keep silence!”

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