

Peter M. Antoci  
Advent 4A  
Isaiah 7:10-16, Matt 1:18-25

*Beginnings & Endings*

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I have a confession to make: for some reason it has always been easier for me to accept the Resurrection of Christ, than the Virgin Birth. Maybe some of you have this ambivalence too; or maybe you have been blessed not to be troubled by it at all! The older I get, the more I understand the significance of both of these Christian beliefs; yet I still have more doubts about the Virgin Birth than questions about the Resurrection.

Perhaps that is because I find it easier to imagine a life without an ending, than I do a life without a beginning. Why should that be? I mean, if I can accept life-without-end, what's so hard about life-without-beginning? Is there some flaw in my thinking that I'm not seeing? I pray that one day, God will give me the wisdom I need to plumb this mystery better than I have so far.

*Christ is Risen! A Virgin shall conceive!* Endings and Beginnings. Maybe my problem is that I have separated them into two neat boxes. Or maybe it is because I KNOW how babies are made, but I do NOT know how people rise to new life in Christ. So I'm willing to entertain the mystery of a HEAVENLY LIFE more easily than the mystery of a HEAVENLY BIRTH. Either way, here we are up against the sign that Isaiah called ***deep as Sheol or high as heaven***.

Some endings come with thanksgiving or serenity. Others come too soon, or too painfully. This past week we've seen too many of the second kind. Curiously, it is the same with beginnings. Advent is a time for vigilance, for watching, for taking time to consider what is happening

around us, in our communities and in our own lives. But this is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and the time to reflect on new life and new beginnings is a few short days away. For some, this Christmas will come with thanksgiving. For others, it will come with pain. As the old world passes away, the birth pangs of a new one are upon us.

As I look over today's scriptures from Isaiah and Matthew, I find two questions running through my thoughts:

Where did CHRIST come from? And Where are WE going?  
Where did CHRIST come from? And Where are WE going?

Perhaps beginnings and endings are not so far apart after all. Maybe, the veil between today and eternity is thinner than we are able to see with the naked eye.

I find myself drawn more and more to the two names we are given in today's scriptures: *Emmanuel* and *Jesus*. *Emmanuel: God is with us.* *Jesus: Jahweh saves.* There it is in a nutshell – the whole belief of the early Church: God is with us, and enters creation for the purpose of our highest well-being, our highest good: our salvation. There is no part of this creation that God does not love to its fullest depths, because at its fullest depths there is only *Christ*: the infinite love and salvation of God, in the flesh, inside every atom of every creature.

LOVE is where Christ came from, and LOVE where he has gone. It is where WE came from, and where we can choose to go. Beginnings and endings: the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection – God's eternal circle of love that has left NOTHING and NOONE out.