

Fairy Tales Can Come True

Michael Jenkins

Luke 2:1-19

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We read “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” to our children when they were young. At about that same time, the BBC produced a film version for television. The production values weren’t what viewers today would demand. Actors in woolly suits pretended they were animals. But our children were captivated by the fairy tale about a wicked witch who held the world of Narnia in thrall, turning it into a place where it is “always winter and never Christmas.” And a heroic lion named Aslan laid down his life as a sacrifice for an undeserving boy, and released the captive world from its curse.

The author of the Narnia stories, C. S. Lewis, was one of the most famous Christian writers of the mid-twentieth century. But his own journey into faith was not an easy one. It led from a lonely, tragic childhood in which he lost his mother at a tender age, a youth separated from home in a brutal English boarding school, and the terror of trench warfare in the First World War. When at last he emerged as a professor of literature at Oxford University, he was a grimly convinced atheist.

Until one evening on a long, long walk with his devout Christian, friend J. R. R. Tolkien, the intellect and experience of this skeptical young professor was kindled by his friend’s imagination.

After a satisfying dinner, a few pints of ale, and with their pipes stoked and fired, they trundled round and round Addison’s Walk, the trail by the river just beside Magdalene College.

Both Lewis and Tolkien taught literature, and both loved the myths and legends of the ancient world, especially the heroic tales of Norway and Iceland. They thrilled to the self-sacrifice of god-men who slew the powers of evil incarnated in dragons and the like. Tolkien was a genius. He knew that he could never simply convince his friend of God’s existence with arguments and so-called proofs. And Tolkien was sly. As the two friends regaled one another with their favorite legends, myths and fairy tales, like two little boys thrilling to the stories of dying and rising gods and gods incarnated in disguise, Tolkien placed before Lewis the story Lewis already knew quire well as a Protestant lad from Northern Ireland, of God becoming flesh in Jesus to redeem humanity.

Lewis’ response was predictable. Yes, yes, yes. That’s another fairy tale, another myth, a legend like all the rest. And Tolkien closed in, But, what if this fairy tale is true? What if all the myths and legends told throughout history were intended to prepare the ground so we would be ready when the true fairy tale happened?

The well-placed question, Tolkien understood, may be worth any number of arguments. If one could but hear the gospel story with the ears of a child, one might become open to miracles and wonders that the stiff old mind of an adult could never entertain. Tolkien's question was a seed, planted in Lewis' mind. And, in time, from that seed the fairy tale of Narnia grew.

Here we are again, my dear friends. The story of the first Christmas is read. The carols are sung. The lights and the tinsel and the gifts surround us all. And the Bible verse we need most now may be one we rarely connect with the Christmas story:

And Jesus called a little child to come to him, and he set the child in the midst of his disciples, and he said, I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will not see the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:2-3)

Do you remember that old song, a wonderful American standard?

*Fairy tales can come true
It can happen to you...
If (What?)
If you're young at heart*

Merry Christmas