

## 2023 Christmas Banquet Year in Review

Today's reading comes from the 59<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Deuterocanonical book of Nutana Park Mennonite Church. This, then, is the 59<sup>th</sup> year since the deportation of the Nutana-ites from their 1st Mennonite homeland across the river.

Tucked safely in my corner nook I thought I had escaped. Black Friday had come and gone with nary a scar to the credit card. A late year foray into the lower forty-eight left minimal internal trauma and no gun shot wounds. It was December and still no white stuff to complicate my walking, biking, or driving. The Christmas banquet was fast approaching with still no request for an end year reflection. Rather smugly I quietly closed the door to the long hall and barricaded myself in behind my books of linguistic lore. Alas, I left the sanctuary access unlatched.

An ambassador, nay a ghost of Christmas Banquets Past, eased into my mighty fortress. The specter was none other than the Ghoul of Christmas Banquet present. The deathly mandate was clear and concise: publish or perish. I caressed my commentaries and wept. Then I lapsed into an uneasy slumber.

I dreamed of shortbread, edible scrolls and peppernuts floating all around. Nothing could be done in this dream outside of steeping a pot of tea and tucking into a scroll. It was tasty—marzipan or some fine delight—so I ate another. And another. And another. And then within the dream I crashed from my sugar high and descended into a yet deeper trance. Ever descending into the pit of the subconscious and collective conscious. I heard the voice of Carl Jung cheering me on.

The Temple swirled around me and I beheld the year of 2023. The building appeared as a block of hole riddled Swiss cheese-- aged 59 years mind you. City mice were seen darting in and out as fitted their calendars and temple access. Forever in motion, artists, toastmasters, denominationalists, recovering alcoholics, pianists, fitness masochists, fiddlers, Creative Commoners, highland dancers, parking lot movie goers, children singing / sawing / cooking, crafting and so on. Sunday morning services, funeral services, bible studies, book studies, potlucks and bouncy castles. These, and more, flashed before me. All nations and tribes (Rev 7:9) flowing into and out of the Temple. It dizzied my senses.

These spiritual pilgrims marveled at new sky lights, ceiling tiles and a leak proof roof over their heads. The parking lot again had been sealed and once more had lines. They had a working fridge to keep their fruit from freezing. Record numbers queued up for the yule tide feast and it was nearly overwhelming. It was a sensory over-load. I shielded my gaze with a lexicon and awaited the next set of visions.

After 40 days of fasting from fasting, I was taken to the pinnacle of our temple. The new gables seemed secure, and I beheld a collage of waves breaking in around the outer and inner courtyards. It had the form of a hurricane descending upon the sacred halls. The ocean was filled with Leviathan, sea monsters and most frightening of all an endless flow of red ink. The waves were roiling and boiling. Sabbatical waves, resignation waves, new COVID waves, congregational consultation waves—all smashing and crashing around the temple grounds. I hid my face in bands of swaddling clothe to insulate myself from the stormy blast.

Mortal, a voice spoke over the din and through my sound suppression, this too shall pass. A time, and a time and half, and perhaps another bit of time shall be, and all will be revealed. I am the Ancient of Days. I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I walk with my people through the fire, the water, and the red ink. And the roiling and boiling of the sea ceased. The ringing in my ears stopped. Was this the eye of the hurricane or had the sea truly been stilled?

I awoke with more questions than answers. The voice and words from the Ancient of Days left a lasting impression. The young will find partners and we will celebrate their unions. Families will continue having children and we will celebrate the births. Pastors will come and they will go, and we will give thanks for their ministry among us. Noble ones of the land will age and die (as we all must), and we will honour their passing. These promises and predictions from the Ancient of Days are indeed a reflection of 2023 and portent for 2024. And there ended the visions.

This, then, has been the year in review given to the seer located in the nether quadrant of the Temple quarters. It was commissioned for the 59<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Deuterocanonical book of Nutana Park Mennonite Church. Let it be so recorded.

Patrick Preheim, co-pastor Nutana Park Mennonite Church