



## The hidden Nativity

This year a different picture decorates our Christmas message. It is a work by the artist Werner Seebacher. For some of you it may seem incomprehensible, perhaps even disturbing at first glance. Yes, disturbing it should be, if we engage with it a little and explore it at our leisure. So let's go on a journey of discovery and first try to orient ourselves a little and see what we might recognize:

Of course, in the first moment appears a disorderly "colour composition", bright yellowish elements are covered by dark, blue-black. You could almost say restrained and everything seems somehow chaotic.



From what appears to be a more free opening to the right of the centre a reflection emerges onto the dark surface further to the right, seeking its way out of the embrace.

A closer look at this reflection reveals an angel held in orange with outstretched hands. (See image right)

If we now go deeper under the angel, we recognize in the darkness a group of figures, two shepherds and a sheep. One of the shepherds bows, while the other stretches his hands towards heaven. (See image 2 right )

In the dark area in the middle you could identify a group of different people, hectically crowded together.

To the left, a female figure in a dark reddish tone stands out. It seems as if she was placed behind this crowding group and she still receives the glow from within. This impression of spatiality is deepened by the paper card pasted on the background of the picture.



At the right edge of the picture, we see another figure. She seems to stand far away in the foreground and to turn her head towards the action in the centre of the picture. Her hands are crossed in front of her chest. She seems sad and horrified by the wild happenings in the centre of the picture. In the colours of the robe, there is the warming yellow of the hidden center the orange of the angel, and something reddish from the female figure from the left half of the picture. In it, the hope is reflected that from the happening still, something completely different could grow out. (See image 3 right)

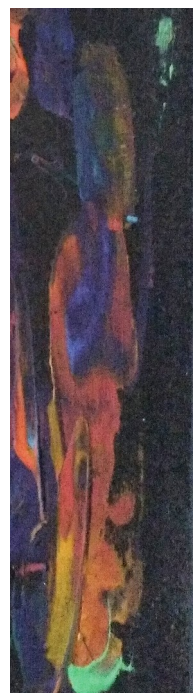


**What does this picture tell us?** - Again we celebrate the feast of Christmas. We rejoice in the birth of the Savior, celebrate nativity plays, give presents to family and friends, sit together at a more or less festively decorated table. An ideal world on the one hand - and on the other?

There are often quarrels and arguments, because suddenly too many people are together in the same place, because emotions run high and expectations are not met. Because the perhaps otherwise superficial life is put to the test by the sudden closeness, and thus the supposed narrowness.

In the westernised world, Christmas also includes shopping, the annoying sound of Christmas carols in many places, the peculiar hectic pace of people, etc. The image brings a lot to the point here, because Christmas, the gentle feast of love, is in principle still there, it shines in secret, in the background. It is hidden, covered, painted over, disguised, - perhaps one could say also littered.

How it really is about Christmas in many places is shown in the centre of the picture. People crowd, almost scuffle, around the central point, but they do not seem to recognise it in its truth, to push it aside. They do not perceive the other shadowy figures of the scene, seem disconnected from them, almost isolated. Everything is disorganised, appears loud, rolls over and in chaos, - and disregards the central quiet happening. In all the hustle and bustle, the hidden centre seems almost annoying and troublesome, because it invites, actually demands, to reflect



on what is really essential. Not on any material goods, advantages or other privileges, but on the miracle of life that God gives - even and perhaps especially in the simplest hut, in the most deserted and lonely place in the world.

This crowd also reflects the self-centredness, the egotism that prevails in many places, which obscures the view of the common, the togetherness - that togetherness from which everyone would benefit much more. Instead, people box, despise, slander, cheat, lead behind the light, and much more. Whether this is in the small surrounding field or the large politics, humans are and remain humans' worst enemy. This shadow side, this dark side of man, obscures the love becoming man of God. Only dimly does what is actually important penetrate to the outside, is hardly perceived, and if so, then only briefly.

And yet the hope and faith lives, in the shadowy figure on the right. It is as if she takes something in the heart (hence the crossed hands in front of the chest), as if she would try to save something from the chaos. That "something" that gives us light, warmth, security, love - and actually life itself. It is the love of God that, according to the Scriptures, made the birth of a special person happen in a simple stable. A person who was to change the world, and whose spirit still calls us today. May we remember this in silence, and reach out to one another, opening doors and hearts so that the hidden miracle may come forth and enter us as well.

*God let you have a blessed Christmas.*

*God grant you the necessary peace so that you can engage in Christmas and the good news.*

*God take away your worries and fear  
and give you new hope.*

*God prepare for you the space that you need  
and where you can be as you are.*

*God give you the ability to marvel  
about the miracle of the birth in the stable of Bethlehem.*

*God make whole what you have broken  
and lead you to reconciliation.*

*God give you determination, imagination and courage,  
so that you can make Christmas for others.*

*God stay with you with the light of the Holy Night,  
when dark days come.*

*God bless you and give you his peace.*

Image source: wes.art, "The hidden crib", painting acrylic on wood and paper, painted by Werner E. Seebacher, 2020

