

HEAD LINES

A monthly message from Chip Denton, Head of School



“It seems, then,” said Tirian, smiling to himself, “that the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places.”

“Yes,” said the Lord Digory. “Its inside is bigger than its outside.”

“Yes,” said Queen Lucy. “In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.”

– C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*



December 2020

Dear Trinity Community,

Merry Christmas! I say so in full knowledge that “merry” is not an adjective many of us would choose in responding to a casual “How are you?” these days. I will not rehearse, again, the woes and very unmerry statistics of this dismal year. And with the longer nights, the cold winds, and the normal season of sickness compounding this COVID catastrophe, it really does feel like it is “always winter and never Christmas.” That Narnian metaphor for our fallen condition ambushes us now. This year might it be, literally, true?

I say not. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our pandemic calculations. “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all, so that we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

’Tis the season to see what is unseen, like children trying to get a peek at Santa. And for this most supernatural act, I recommend a trip to C. S. Lewis’s Narnia. “There is no frigate like a book/To take us lands away”—or even worlds away. In Narnia there are always other worlds—always a portal, a gateway, or a peephole from one world to another. The most famous of these, of course, is Lucy’s wardrobe, from the spare room of the Professor’s house to the wintry world where she meets Mr. Tumnus the faun. I am thinking today of another portal, from the final book in the series. There is a dingy stable at the center of this story (spoiler alert!), where the last king of Narnia, Tirian, fights with the forces of cruelty and deception. This stable is a dreaded hut, and in his fierce fight against his enemy Tirian is backed up to its door. In a final and desperate act, he grabs his foe and jumps backwards into the stable, throwing them both into the dark, feared hut where the frightful god Tash is supposed to lurk. But inside it was not dark, dingy, or cramped: Tirian found himself in a wide expanse of a sunlit world, fair and full of friends. Two of those, Lord Digory and Queen Lucy, help him see that “the stable seen from within and the stable seen from without are two different places.” He could never have imagined the reality on this sunlit side of the door, and he can now see the dark world only through a small peephole in an odd door leading to nowhere, planted in the middle of the field, like some prop on an avant-garde stage.

And so for us. The pandemic seen from within and the pandemic seen from without are two different things. And not just this pandemic, but all the world as we know it. This is one of the distinctive callings of a Christian school—to awaken in our students such a vision. “The job of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts,” as Lewis said elsewhere. This conviction was at the heart of the founding of Trinity School. Our teachers are committed to igniting the imagination and faith of every student, to sharing a glimpse of the inside that is bigger than the outside.

The Biggest of these small things is a baby in Bethlehem. Sometimes it is said that the Incarnation is the doctrine that God became human, and if we are willing to put up with some imprecision, this is not a harmful formulation. But it is not the half of it. The orthodox theologians tell us that in the Incarnation God took humanity *into God's own self*. God *assumed* humanity. Look at Jesus: his inside is bigger than his outside. When Simeon held Jesus in his arms (Luke 2:28), he saw with the eyes of faith that this small baby was somehow all that he and his people could ever have hoped for, the consolation of all of Israel. The sheer *density* of that little child far outweighed his fragile frame: here was an eternal glory that far outweighed his earthly mass. It is notable that Rembrandt, in his famous painting of Simeon, takes poetic license and paints him blind: the one who, not seeing, sees truly. All one can do, in such a moment of true seeing, is to worship.

I fully expect to have better Christmases in years to come at Trinity School—when faculty can again sing Christmas carols on the porch as the students arrive; when faculty, staff, and Board can gather for our annual Christmas dinner; when the entire school can come together for our Service of Lessons and Carols; when the TK Cubs can act out their nativity play before a crowded room of parents and grandparents. But I don't expect ever to have a Christmas that shines a brighter light on the good news that the baby born in Bethlehem is the salvation God prepared in the presence of all peoples.

Merry Christmas.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chip Denton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chip Denton
Head of School