

A Christmas Testimony
Randolph the Olive Green
Matthew 1:18-2:12
December 24, 2002
Peter Hiatt

[An old man dressed in an olive green robe and a long, grey hat walks stooping onto stage. A staff helps him. Music plays in the background; smoke surrounds him; his voice thunders.]

[With an English accent . . .]

I am Randolph Gaspar Mithrandel!
Lord of Thunder!
Master of Fire!
Concierge of confetti!

Abracadabra! [Sound of a diesel train]
Kalamazoo! [Sound of a cuckoo clock]
Buenos Nachos! [Sound of toilet flushing]
Do not mock me, or I'll turn you into a bullfrog! [Sound
of a kitten]
I said *bullfrog!* [Sound of a bullfrog]

I am Randolph, brother of Gandalf, nephew of Rudolph, who was cursed by a witch and turned into a deer and banished to the uttermost north. I am Randolph the Olive Green (actually, something of a forest green), brother of Gandalf the Grey. Some call me Randy.

Actually, I am a wizard. I have been summoned by your pastor saying, "Speak to us, oh Randy, as a herald bearing testimony to the incarnation of the Great One." I said OK.

I am one of the wizards—the wise men—the “magi,” as your Holy Book says, from whence you derive your word “magician.” I am not a king but a king-maker and an enchanter of kings. We magi hail from Babylon and the Medo-Persian Empire, or as you know it in your folklore, “Orient R.” We were astrologers, astronomers, and psychic weathermen. We said “hmmm” a lot, and we wondered a lot.

Apart from a painful experience with a rubber cigar which was loaded and exploded, we commanded a great deal of respect throughout the Empire. We wielded power through knowledge. Much of it was illusion and big words like psychosis, mitosis, halitosis. But much of the time we did business with spirits, which I now know were demons.

A magician seeks to control spiritual realities in order to wield power. All men are born with magician hearts. We even try to control God. As the ancient ones said, “Men, above all else, seek power.” We desire to enchant those around us and bring those around us under our control. Yet we remain alone.

Oswaldo, my fellow wizard of the kingdom of Oz (a province of Medo-Persia) . . . Ozzie used to say:

Randy, I am the Great and Powerful Oz! But I feel like a weak, little man behind the curtain pulling levers and switches. And the more power I have, the more I must say, “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.” But that man is me, all the more frightened, alone, and invisible . . . less wise man and more wise guy . . . a magician with no magic in my soul.

My brother Gandalf used to tell me a story about a ring of power. I suppose the story isn’t true, yet it is absolutely true.

It seems there was a creature named Gollum (from the Hebrew “Golem,” meaning unmade, half-made, not fully made). Gollum had come to possess a ring of power which he called his Precious. It gave him power over others, for it rendered him invisible. But being invisible, he was entirely alone. He lived in the dark, insane and divided. He loved the power, but he no longer had power to love or to be loved.

In the words of Gandalf, “He was altogether wretched. He hated the dark and he hated light more. He hated everything, and the ring most of all.” I said, “Gandalf, why didn’t he get rid of it? Is that not reasonable?” Gandalf replied, “Randy, he hated it and loved it, as he hated himself and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter.”

You see, he had a ring of power yet was entirely enslaved . . . enslaved to being Golem: alone, unmade, not fully made . . . and stuck there. He could not truly die, yet he was not truly alive. He was the walking dead.

Of course, you of all people know that that is *our* story ever since our first father and mother were tempted by the Evil One. He tempted them with stolen power. Knowledge is power. They took the fruit before they were fully made, thinking they could make themselves. Immediately they covered themselves and hid, hoping to be invisible . . . “Hating self and loving self, unable to get rid of self, having no will left in the matter.”

So we all remained Golem, clutching rings of power and hiding in shame.

Do you live in fear and shame? Do you think, “If they knew who I was, no one would love me. So I must hide me and put on a show. I must cast a spell and so bind people to myself with power, manipulation, gifts, kindness, Christmas cards”?

So you love people yet hate people,
 love self yet hate self,
 love God yet hate God —
 hate God because He sees . . .
 and you can't hide.

Power made Gollum invisible, yet he was more visible to the Evil One. And *all things* are visible to God. He sees and He knows!

. . . I'm sorry . . . I'm beginning to preach, and you get enough of that around here . . .

What I was saying was that I, Randolph, was Golem. And I had powers, but really the powers had me. And I hated God. In those days we called Him the Great Silent One. It does not take a wise man to see that meddling demons did not create the world, stars, and us. And we did not create ourselves, as some of your wizards say.

In Gandalf's legends, Iluvatar, the Great One, created all things with a song. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Great One created all things with a Word. Well, I, Randy Golem, coveted the Creator's Word of power. And I suspected that God could see me. So I hated Him, for I figured He hated me. I imagined that if He got the chance, he'd turn me into a frog.

Well then, surely you must be thinking, "Randy, you are a stupid wise man. Why would you go to Bethlehem to see Him?" Answer: For the same reason many of you came tonight. I thought I could flatter Him with gifts . . . brown nose the Creator . . . get on His good side . . . buy a stairway to Heaven . . . enchant Him to myself. Schmoozing kings was our business (King Schmoozers R Us).

And so it happened that in 7 B.C., Jupiter, the king's planet, was coming into alignment with Saturn, deemed the shield of Palestine, all within the constellation Pisces—the constellation of epic events. We believed this forebode two things: 1.) it was a very good time to pick up chicks; 2.) A cosmic king would appear in Palestine at the culmination of all history.

More than this, we had legends and Scriptures obtained from the Jews, the people of the West, whom we had taken into captivity in Babylon. They spoke of the Great Silent One as if He was not silent. Some of them—Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—had power that could not be thwarted by our greatest magi. They spoke of a coming King that would liberate the Jews, taking them back to their home in the West.

I also dreamed, in secret places, that He would liberate me.

Even our poets foretold Him. Like us, they were pagans, mind you, and did not know what they sang. (They say that if you sing their music backwards, it's evil. But I think it's pretty good forward . . .) They sang . . .

[Singing]

There's a feeling I get when I look to the west,
And my spirit is crying for leaving.
In my thoughts I have seen
Rings of smoke through the trees,
And the voices of those who stand looking.

Ooh . . . and it makes me wonder . . .

Ooh . . . and it makes me wonder . . .

And it's whispered that soon, if we all call the tune
Then the piper will lead us to reason.

And a new day will dawn for those who stand long
And the forest will echo with laughter . . .

Ooh . . . and it makes me wonder . . .

And it did make me wonder. I thought, “Perhaps it’s not power but the Piper who will lead us to reason.” You see, the Great Silent One really is not silent. He is the light that enlightens all men.

Well, on top of all this, a new star appeared in the West, and then it was clear: We must at least attempt to enchant the newborn king to us. We did not actually expect the Great God, but at least someone very well connected.

We set out from Babylon, a fellowship of three: Balthasar Oswald, Melchior Merlin, and me—Randolph Gaspar the Olive Green. Ozzy, Mel, and Randy . . . and of course, 632 servants, cooks, and soldiers . . . soldiers, on the off chance that the Jews were still a little bit perturbed over that whole unfortunate Babylonian captivity incident.

Being stupid wise men, we brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Perhaps a nice plastic farm animal set would have been more appreciated by the boy king. But gold, frankincense and myrrh were precious, and they symbolized power. And we hoped they would enchant the new king unto us for years to come.

To pass the time on our long journey, we made up a song. We entitled it “We Three Kings of Orient R.” Granted, it’s a bit arrogant, but it sounds better than “We Three Wizards of Orient R.” The chorus went, “Westward leading, still proceeding,” etc., etc. . .

I sang, “Gold I bring to crown Him again, King forever,
ceasing never, over us all to reign.”

Then Melchior: “Frankincense to offer have I. Incense
owns a Deity nigh,” la la la . . .

Then Ozzy: “Myrrh is mine: Its bitter perfume, breathes
a life of gathering gloom. Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding
dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb.”

When Ozzy sang that I cried, “Oswaldo, that’s not fit for the
king! . . . ‘sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying!’” He said, “I
know, but it rhymes.” I said, “Well, this song definitely needs
another verse.”

We journeyed to Jerusalem thinking a king would be born in the
king’s palace. The king seemed very interested in our story, but
the newborn king was not there. It was then I perceived our
grave error. You see, King Herod bore a ring of great power, so
he hated all rivals. He bore a ring of great power, so he no
longer had power to love. He commanded all that power but
could not command one tear or one genuine kiss.

And this is the problem with kings and wizards and all who
wield power: Power cannot command love. And the more it
tries, the more it fails. King Herod was utterly wretched, alone,
and trapped in himself. And I wondered about the Great One.
Would He be that much more wretched since He was that much
more powerful?

Well, Herod consulted his wizards, and they informed him that
the Messiah, King of the Jews, was to be born in Bethlehem.
And that’s when things got strange. Bethlehem was a village of
shepherd hovels. We followed the star, and it came to rest over

a shack on the edge of town. I thought, “Good Lord, the star is broken. What will we do now?” Yet it was not broken. By our calculations the boy would be one or two years of age, and we expected servants, attendants, and regents . . . but not this lonely shack! What happened next is so easy to describe and yet utterly impossible to describe; so non-magical, yet entirely enchanted . . .

I went to the door and knocked. A young peasant woman (perhaps 15 years of age) answered the door. I could tell she was somewhat taken aback by me and 634 Medo-Persian king-makers, some in full battle gear. Yet when I said, “We’ve come to see the one born King of the Jews,” she knew exactly what I was talking about. She called, “Jesus, come here.”

At that a toddler ran around the door. When he saw me, his eyes lit up. He ran to me, seized my leg giggling, and wouldn’t let go. The young woman said, “I’m sorry. You must excuse him.” I thought, “*Excuse* him! He is entirely undivided, at peace, the Prince of peace . . . so entirely unbound and free . . . so entirely alive!” I had never known anything other than golem.

Now you may think I’m melodramatic, but something else was also happening. When you’ve dealt with darkness as long as I, you not only feel the weariness and shame of this world, as we all do, but you are constantly aware of the oppressive presence of demons. When the boy touched my leg, they all fled like shadows in the sun. And I thought, “Somehow this is the Great One . . . or the Son of the Great One.” So powerful! Yet so weak and hugging my leg.

Then a new terror gripped me. In a flash I thought, “Goodness gracious! If He loves all men like this, He could get crucified! He’s liable to walk right into the arms of Herod!” Of course, these were feelings, premonitions, and incomplete thoughts . . .

Well, Mary peeled Him off my leg. He stood in front of me, put His hands up, and said, “Up . . . up . . .” I picked Him up, and He kissed me. He saw *me*—Golem—and He kissed me. He didn’t kill me or turn me into a frog; He kissed me. And I wondered, “Is this what He wanted? Is this why He came?”

We get large and powerful to control people . . . but small and weak to get good kisses.

So I came to purchase my stairway to Heaven, and I got kisses for free. I had come prepared with gifts, songs, and power as a defense against the Great One. But already He had snuck into the fortress of my soul, behind the curtain, and He loved the little, wretched man clinging to the levers and switches. Unnoticed by the evil eye, He snuck into the dark depths of my heart and kissed Gollum.

If He would have been large and wielding power, all my defenses would have been up. But the Great One, having all power, had laid it down. He had “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” And I thought to myself, “Perhaps there is a power more powerful than power.”

Indeed I would learn that the One who kissed me was the Word of God . . . not a magic word to be used by vain men to gain power, but the Word through whom all things are made. And the Word had become flesh and was enchanting my soul.

In this fallen world, this middle earth (halfway between Heaven and Hell), the one who most desires power usually loves the least. And the one who most surrenders power usually loves the most. Ever since the first father and mother seized the fruit from the tree, we have loved least and perhaps not at all. But God loves most.

And as I held Him in my arms, I knew He was love, emptied of power. I think it was then that I loved Him. He enchanted my soul like a song.

Perhaps the Piper leads us to reason. The Piper *is* the Reason, the Song, the Word, the Logos, the Love of God. “We piped,” taught Jesus, “and you would not dance.” Will you dance?

You see, for the first time, I saw Love . . . not lust or covetousness, but Love. And seeing Him, I thought the unthinkable and the entirely reasonable: I wanted to surrender my Precious—my self—my ring of power—and dance! I wanted to kiss Him back. That is worship. In the old language, to kiss and to worship are the very same word.

Well, sometimes a story is best to explain the heart. There is a legend they tell about the three of us. It is not true, yet it is entirely true. It goes like this . . .

An angel met me at the door in Bethlehem. “All who enter must bring a gift,” the angel said. I replied, “I’ve brought the finest gold.” The angel said, “Your gift must be of the essence of yourself . . . precious to your soul.” I said, “So it is . . . my Precious.”

But as I knelt to offer the gold, I looked in my hands, and there lay not the gold but a hammer, its handle rough wood, and the head larger than a man’s fist. The angel whispered, “What you hold in your hand is the hammer of your greed used to pound wealth from those who labor for you, that you may live in mansions while they live in hovels.”

I looked at the hovel in which I knelt. I bowed in great shame and turned to leave, but the angel blocked my way. “You have not offered your gift.” Then I blurted out, “I can’t give this to

the boy king!” “But this is why you came,” said the angel. “You cannot take it back. Leave it here, or it will destroy you.”

Melchior brought frankincense won in battle at the side of kings. “Is it precious to your soul?” asked the angel. As Melchior nodded, it turned into his own spear, long and soaked in blood. He cried, “The enemy has cast a spell!” “That is more true than you know,” said the angel.” “I cannot leave this!” cried Melchior. “He’s but a child, and the spear could pierce his flesh.” “You must,” the angel replied.

The angel turned to Oswald holding myrrh. “Is it the essence of yourself?” “Yes . . . precious,” Oswald replied. The silver flask instantly turned to a clay beaker. He smelled the contents and moaned, “It’s vinegar!” The angel said, “Yes. It is what you are full of: bitterness, lies, wrath. You must give it to Him.” Oswald screamed, “He might drink it, and it’s poison!” “You must leave that to Him,” replied the angel.

Hammer, spear, vinegar . . . this much is true: We gave our power, we gave our shame, and then we worshipped. (Rings of power are very heavy.) We danced with Him, and we went home another way . . . another way.

I remember what the old pagan poet sang . . .

[Singing]

Yes, there are two paths you can go by,
But in the long run
There's still time to change the road you're on . . .
Ooh . . . and it makes me wonder . . .

Your head is humming and it won't go,
In case you don't know,
The piper's calling you to join him,

Dear lady, can you hear the wind blow,
 And did you know
 Your stairway lies on the whispering wind.

It's an illusion! You cannot buy a stairway to Heaven! Many who say they are followers of Christ are only trying to buy a stairway to Heaven, and they've never heard the music. Did you think you could purchase God's favor with your power over money or knowledge or people or yourself? Did you think you could purchase God's favor with even your power over your own sins? Don't you see your power *is* sin?

With our power we try to cover our sin, which *is* sin;
 With our power we try to hide from our Creator;
 With our power we try to make ourselves God and save ourselves alone.

But the Piper is calling you to join Him. Will you hear the music and lose yourself and dance? Will you hear the music, which is God's Word of grace and love? — *Jesus*, through whom all things are made?

Golem, will you hear the music
 and surrender your power,
 surrender to being made . . .
 surrender to Jesus?

There are two paths you can go by: Jesus (His name means "God saves"), or Me-sus ("I save").

We left Bethlehem no longer enchanters of kings but thoroughly enchanted with The King. And I wondered what He would do with our gifts. I mean, golly, I hoped they'd sell the gold, frankincense, and myrrh and buy a couch or something. But what would he do with our gifts of greed, wrath, and hatred? —

our gifts of shameful power, that is, our sin? For years I wondered, and I wondered about Gandalf's stories . . .

He said that a ring bearer was chosen to destroy the ring of power, for that ring was the foundation of all the Evil One's power in Middle Earth. It could only be destroyed in the fires of Mt. Doom.

A small, unassuming, humble hobbit was chosen to carry the ring into the depths of the Evil One's home and cast it into the fire of Mt. Doom. The Evil Eye would not see it coming, for the thought of surrendering power is beyond his reckoning. That is, he is incapable of seeing love. "The light shines in the darkness, and he cannot comprehend it." He cannot hear the piper's music.

When the ring is cast into Mt. Doom, the Evil One's power is broken.

So I wondered what Jesus would do with the hammer, spear, and vinegar. It was about thirty years later when we heard the story: "The Prince of Peace embraced the gloom and walked the night alone." Although they tried to make Him king, He turned His face to Jerusalem. He walked right into the arms of King Herod. They laid Him down upon a cross . . .

They took a *hammer* with a rough, wooden handle and a head the size of a man's fist, and they hammered nails through His wrists and feet.

At one point they thrust a long, bloody *spear* into His side.

As He hung dying, they gave Him *vinegar*. He drank it and said, "It is finished."

It was beyond the Evil One's reckoning. He couldn't see it coming. They say my Lord descended into the fires of Hell bearing *my* sins, *my* gifts. And on the third day He rose, and the Evil One's power over planet Earth was broken.

So now the Evil One's power is only what we give him—the power of our own shame. But you can give it to the Ring Bearer.

Scripture says the Word of the cross *is* the power of God. The cross of Christ *is* the power of God unto salvation. There is no greater power, and it is power surrendered. It is love, and God is love. Jesus is the love of God for you. There is no greater power.

So what will you give the Christ this Christmas? How about your ring of power? How about your self? — visible, not the act, not the image, but yourself as you are? That is who He loves. That is who He died for. He will cleanse you, and He will finish making you with Himself.

We are all Golem . . . half-made.

But surrender, and He enters our wretched, stone cold hearts, and we die with Him and are raised forever with Him, complete and immortal.
Amen.

And so we finished our song:

Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

Glorious now behold Him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice.

Alleluia, alleluia!
Sounds through the earth and skies.

If you want Jesus to forgive your sins and make you complete forever, pray with me:

Jesus, I confess I am a sinner
(trapped in my own sin).
I trust you to forgive me
(through your cross).
I ask you to *make* me
(like yourself).
Be born in me
(Christmas in me).
Thank you for saving me.

Amen.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:1-14).

Amen.

And now I will attempt to speak without an English accent . . .

I really meant what I said. I want you to believe and know, because it's true, that God thoroughly loves you and desires you and longs to commune with you. You cannot save yourself. That's why He did that. He certainly is a King unlike other kings.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, may you believe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.” When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.’” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:1-12

And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.”

Matthew 27:35-37

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. . . . The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his

dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 9-14

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

And there in his [Gollum's] hiding place he kept a few wretched oddments, and one very beautiful thing, very beautiful, very wonderful. He had a ring, a golden ring, a precious ring. . . . He wanted it because it was a ring of power, and if you slipped that ring on your finger, you were invisible

J. R. R. Tolkien, The Hobbit

“He [Gollum] was altogether wretched. He hated the dark, and he hated light more: he hated everything, and the Ring most of all.”

“What do you mean?” said Frodo. “Surely the Ring was his precious and the only thing he cared for? But if he hated it, why didn't he get rid of it, or go away and leave it?”

“You ought to begin to understand, Frodo, after all you have heard,” said Gandalf. “He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter.”

J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

“Well, let folly be our cloak, a veil before the eyes of the Enemy! For he is very wise, and weighs all things to a nicety in the scales of his malice. But the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it, that having the Ring we may seek to destroy it. If we seek this, we shall put him out of reckoning.”

“At least for a while,” said Elrond. “The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.”

J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

You can't keep the Gospel out of stories.

Attributed to J. R. R. Tolkien

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

I Corinthians 1:18

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

II Corinthians 12:9-10

The Prince of Peace embraced the gloom and walked the night alone.

Led Zeppelin

There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the incarnation.

Madeleine L'Engle

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