

...BRIDGES... Number 12, 2006: Christmas in the Old Town Square

on behalf of the ECCB's American Working Group and PC(USA)'s Czech Mission Network by Joyce Michael

This evening (12/31/06), John and I went to the Old Town Square, so that he could take some pictures to include in his slideshow when we are in the United States for our next period of mission interpretation. Being relatively reserved people, we normally do not go to the center of the city on New Year's Eve. However, we had heard a lot about the beauty of the Old Town Square this year, so we wanted to check it out. Although there were people everywhere, we had a grand time, gazing at the Christmas tree, sampling special holiday foods, and watching children enjoy the antics of the balloon maker who had taken up residence on the stage that is erected in the square each year. Looking at the enchanted children, I remembered an evening just after Christmas in 2005 when I had stood before the same stage, watching a different sort of performance, which seemed to confirm my suspicion that this "a-theistic" society is actually much more "faithful" than that self-designation might imply.

In hopes of snapping a good photo, John had climbed up to the look-out point that enables Christmas visitors to get a panoramic glimpse of the square. However, I had stayed on the ground because the schedule of events posted next to the stage indicated that a "večerníček" would soon take place. "Večerníček" actually means "bedtime story." However, I know it best as a series of short children's cartoons that are shown on television every night just before the evening news. Being eager to be part of a live "večerníček," I was intrigued when a noisy troop of actors and actresses chaotically made their way onto the stage.

At first, I was clueless about what was happening, but it soon became apparent that we were watching an unusual dramatization of the Christmas story. For several scenes, there was much hilarity and some conflict between the shepherds who were central figures in the play. But, after a time, the mystery of Christmas was boldly proclaimed, as one of the performers repeatedly declared: "God has come to everyone." The cast of characters' response to this message was varied, but, in the end, everyone joined together in singing some of the beloved Czech carols that are a winsome part of holiday traditions here.

And, I do mean everyone! The performers on the stage, the lady next to me, the teenager standing a few steps away, and all of the other Czech people in the crowd, were singing: "Narodil se Kristus Pán,

Veselme se." (Christ the Lord is born. Let us rejoice.) The corporate singing did not end when that beloved song concluded, however. Other traditional carols were crooned, and I had a strong sense that I was in the midst of a spontaneous act of worship in the one of the most public places in Prague.

"God has come to everyone," the actress declared, and all of the people sang, here in this extremely secular milieu, which nevertheless dares to dramatize the promise of Christmas for its children and their adult companions. It thus appears that this society may be uniquely able to receive and mediate the traditions of Christianity, in a way that does not compromise anyone's freedom to affirm a different faith or to adhere to no religion at all, but in a way which also makes this fact quite palpable: The mediator of God's love is always born into the midst of a noisy and chaotic world, whether it be peopled by rowdy shepherds, skeptical secularists, or faithful adherents.

Božena Komárková clearly anticipates this possibility when she writes: "Faith is not limited to the confessional community. The Spirit of God blows where it pleases, and is also audible to the Christian conscience in the profane world." In a public place – in an atheistic society – through a secular troop of actors, the Christmas truth may presence so recognizably that Christians and secularists alike are obliged to join together in heralding Christ's birth. Holy profanity, indeed!