

Story: The 'Io's Christmas Song

December 22, 2024

Micah 5;2-5a

Luke 3:46-55

The 'io is not famous for singing. It makes a loud cry, for sure, which is majestic and dramatic, but nobody would call it musical. Except, perhaps, for once long ago, so long ago that there were no people living here on Hawai'i Island, and it belonged to the birds.

You see, there was an 'io who wanted to sing. She'd heard the 'apapane and the rest. She'd even admired the more subtle honks of the nene. When, she wondered, could she sing like that?

One morning, as the sun rose over the sea, the 'io felt the world change. One moment everything was as it had always been, the next she knew that something different, something extraordinary, something wonderful, had taken place. Somehow she knew, deep in her heart, that the Creator had become part of the Creation in a deeply special way. Somehow she knew, though she never knew the name and didn't even know what a human baby looked like, that Jesus, the Christ, was born.

When you know something that's that wonderful, you just can't keep still. She leapt into the air and soared through the sky. But that wasn't enough. She danced on the breeze, pirouetted through the sky. And that wasn't enough. Even though she knew she couldn't do it, even though she knew it would be the same cry she'd always made, she opened her beak to sing.

Then: she sang.

There's an old story that on the night Jesus was born, the animals across the world gained the ability to speak in human language. Who knows if that was true on Hawai'i Island, where there were no people whose language they could speak? What there was, was singing. And on that Christmas morning, an 'io sang.

She sang so loud and so well that the 'apapane began to sing along, and even to make new harmonies. Then the 'amakihi chimed in, and the 'akepa. The koa'e kea soared above the Kilauea caldera, and both noio and pueo flew up from the seacoast and the grasslands. Every one of them, with a voice they'd never known before, sang.

The 'io led them all in the song, making new melodies, new variations, new rhythms. As she did, she circled and rolled, dove and climbed, dancing on the air, as the smaller birds wheeled around her.

It didn't last long. Songs, even songs of joy, have an end. The small birds went back to the nectar in the trees. The pueo returned to the grasslands, the noio to the sea.

The 'io let her tired wings carry her back to a tall tree, where she settled and breathed in, breathed out, because it's a lot of work singing and flying and dancing at the same time.

An i'iwi poked its beak out of the next tree and chirped, "Thank you for the good news and the good song."

The 'io nodded back and said, "You're welcome. Thank you for singing with me."

And that is how the 'io sang a Christmas song.

by Eric Anderson