

Saturday "Sermon"

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Finding Narnia

I went to see *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* during the Christmas season. I had been disappointed with previous cinematic efforts to capture the wonder of the book, but this film gets it right. When my twenty-five year-old daughter, Anna, saw the film, a young man about her age exclaimed from the row behind her, "It's just like I remember it!" And Anna thought so, too.

Now the Narnia Anna and that young man "remember" is not a place to which they have physically been. What they meant is that the film captures well what they had experienced in imagination when they read—or heard, for the *Chronicles* are meant to be read aloud—the book themselves.

Lewis wanted his writings to be "one of God's bellows to blow upon the half-dead coals of longing" in his readers' breasts, kindling the fires of imagination to help persons discover that they were made for, and in fact long for, God. And, although Lewis denied that the *Chronicles* are an allegory, there is no denying that Lewis included all of the major events of the Christian Story in the *Chronicles*.

Do children get that out of Narnia? Probably not right away. But if the imagination has been kindled and the nerve of religious awe enlivened, the time will come when the child (or adolescent, or adult) senses the "Beyond" breaking into life, and will say with conviction, "So that's what Aslan meant!"

A college student, seeing a professor carrying several of the *Chronicles*, commented, "I love Lewis. I once read the Narnia books as quickly as my little sister let me have them! There has to be a place like Narnia somewhere. Someday I'll find it."

Even so, Walter Hooper, Lewis's long-time friend, wrote that "By degrees which are often unnoticed by even the most cautious atheist, we progress from a love of Narnia, to a greater love of Aslan himself, to a sharp regret that there is no Aslan in this world, to a sudden recognition which makes the heart sing that there *is* an Aslan in this world—and then, if my own experience is any guide, Narnia and this world interlock and Aslan and Christ are seen as one."

At the end of all the stories, Aslan tells the children, "In your world I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little while, you may know me better there."