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Sacred Time (Melinda Johnson)

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In my memory, the most poignant children's books were those about time travel. The characters would fall into the past, form friendships through shared adventures, and then be snatched back to the present, to grieve over the loss of loved ones who were real but no longer accessible.

Until now, Christianity seemed to me like an attempt at time travel. Belief was a groping hand reaching blindly along a wall, seeking a door that was no longer there. Until now, my leap of faith comprised an unfounded urge to imagine my way back to some place I had never seen or felt, hoping to catch a glimpse of The Man that could magically set fire to the ashes of my childhood faith.



Until now.

In this church, with its soft name like breath, its twinkling candle flames, its scented air and rustling chimes, in this sanctuary lit by the dark eyes of the saints, my blind hand has found the door. This is the place described in the time travel books, the mystical room on the other side of the portal. Indeed, I am beyond the reach of those childish heroes. I have stepped across some great folded place in the cosmos, taken the journey from which I will not be snatched back. In this place, the current day, pressing back to its heart in the first days of the faith, surges across the intervening centuries and enters into the still-living past.

The ancient songs chanted by living voices sound just as they did. Flame is flame—the candlelight and prayers have not changed. The icons are not pieces of art but a scrapbook of friends and mentors. The spicy fragrance, the ageless familiar motions of the liturgy, the words referring backward and forward in time, bring the Beloved Presence so close that I expect to hear His footsteps as He moves to sit next to someone and whisper words of encouragement and peace.

These people are not in church. They are cheering one another with their 2000-year-old memories, staying close to Someone they loved and lost, and found again in Spirit and truth. It is not so much faith in the absence of things unseen. It is faith from memory, love from experience. It is a worship of commemoration, the essential human act of cherishing what comforts and revives us, exulting in the

greatest human treasure, the victory of love over death. It is the worship of people who are so sure they were there on the mountain, in the upper room, in the catacombs, that I believe them. Somehow, “in a mystery,” all believers are one. We were there. We are there. He is here.

By Melinda Johnson

Melinda Johnson is the blog chief of [The Sounding](#) at [Orthodox Christian Network](#) and the author of [Letters to Saint Lydia](#) released by Conciliar Press in 2010. Melinda created the popular “Orthodox Writers, Readers, and Artists” series, which first appeared on her blog, Saint Lydia’s Book Club, before moving to The Sounding in early 2012. The Sounding features daily posts by more than 20 Orthodox writers, exploring every aspect of our Orthodox faith at work in everyday life. Melinda earned a Master of Arts in English Literature from The College of William and Mary and worked as an editor specializing in projects for non-native English speakers before becoming a full-time writer.