

Old Church Slavonic

by Steven J. Kolbe

--при Чарльз всесръдъ

Because it seems never to be beginning, always picking up in the middle with it's long resonant tones, which themselves begin as if they've always been. Maybe that's why we love old, sacred music. And by we I, of course, mean my two-year-old Charlie and me.

Charlie is our good sleeper. Usually all it takes is his head to hit the pillow, then lights out, but even he suffers from the occasional nocturnal unrest. On such rare occasions, I'll find something clerical on Youtube for us to listen to. At the first chanted note--be it Latin or Greek, Coptic or Hebrew or Old Church Slavonic--he settles right down.

At the bottom of each song are long chains of internet discussions that began and ended before Charlie was born, and maybe that's why he loves them--their permanence, the fact that these recordings precede him and that the songs themselves precede us both plus the country we live in. With a few simple notes, we're transported back to an ancient time and then further back still as we pause in praise of Him who existed before the whole world. And it doesn't matter that we can't understand a word or tell if this one is Georgian, that one Aramaic.

I do wonder though if all this exposure to antiquity is keeping Charlie, an expressive babbler, preverbal. I wonder if too much Latin is preventing his mind from progressing the requisite millenia to toddler English. Then again, this is just a writerly reverie.

I know that he will be speaking full sentences soon, not just isolated words, and when that happens it will be difficult to remember what it was like before he did. Then, we will reminisce about these simpler times when all communication was tone and intention, and we will look forward to all the milestones yet to come. For now, I long for the present, which is simultaneously slipping into history yet constantly with us, like a long, even note--its language indistinguishable, its message universal.

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