**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

To those of you who have never come across the writings of C S Lewis, I say: seek them out. And to those who think his books are for children, I say: read them; again if necessary. I have recently returned to the Narnia series after a break of well over 40 years, and have been fired up by them all over again, sparked this time round by a friend telling me about reading them to her children, aged five and seven.

You could see it in their eyes, she said, as they sat there on the sofa, still and pretty well silent, almost unheard-of in children that age, drinking in every last detail of the story, and particularly all they could glean about Aslan.

While The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is always billed as the second of the series, it was the first I knew and should really be read first. It introduces all the key characters.

And you may have thought that, with the Lion being the first bit of the title, said Lion would appear early on. Not so.

Chapter 1 introduces the wardrobe, and chapter 2, the witch. This is Narnia, where it is always winter, but never Christmas. It’s hard to think of that with the sunshine we’ve had over the past few days – always winter, cold and dark, but never Christmas, and no sense of Spring on the horizon.

So surely chapter 3, then, will complete the introductions? Nope; no Lion there. Nor in chapters 4, 5, or 6. And so the tension, and maybe the frustration, mounts.

Then, in chapter 7, we might at long last be catching a glimpse of him, but we discover Lewis is describing ‘Something’ in such a way that we only think we now may finally have found the Lion. The story’s four children – Peter and Edmund, sons of Adam, and Susan and Lucy, daughters of Eve - are lost in the woods, and Susan notices ‘something moving among the trees over there to the left.’

‘Whatever it is,’ says Peter, ‘it’s dodging us. It’s something that doesn’t want to be seen.’

‘It’s — it’s a kind of animal,’ says Susan. Then comes this:

They all saw it this time, a whiskered furry face which had looked out at them from behind a tree. . . . The animal put its paw against its mouth just as humans put their fingers on their lips when they are signalling to you to be quiet. Then it disappeared again. The children all stood holding their breath.

There is a moment of silence and then: It’s a beaver, announces Peter. Still no Lion, but the seeds of anticipation have been planted, and are now growing.

In that first conversation with Beaver, we hear the first mention of the name *Aslan*, though we don’t yet know who or what Aslan is. ‘They say Aslan is on the move — perhaps already landed’ — and when Beaver says this, Lewis tells us:

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don’t understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning — either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare, or else a lovely meaning, too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into the dream again. It was like that now. At the name of Aslan, each one of the children felt something jump inside.

That’s it then for chapter 7. We are strung along into chapter 8, before Beaver tells the children more about Aslan:

‘He’s the King. (*he says*) He’s the Lord of the whole wood; but not often here, you understand. Never in my time or my father’s time. But the word has reached us that he has come back. He is in Narnia at this moment.’

Then Beaver recites an old prophetic rhyme about Aslan. The tension mounts again, and Lucy asks: Is — is he a man? And finally finally, here in chapter 8, almost halfway through the story, we find out that this Aslan is *The Lion* previously only mentioned in the title:

‘Aslan a man!’ says Mr. Beaver sternly. ‘Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the woods and the Son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion — ***the***Lion, the great Lion.’

And then, of course, Susan and Lucy ask if this lion is safe; to which Beaver answers: Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.

After that, we are left hanging again as the story continues down a different thread – in chapter 9, we have Edmund and the Witch, and in 10 the children meet Father Christmas - a bit oddly – but we are still waiting for Aslan to make his Grand Entrance.

And then in chapter 11, the Witch’s servant notices that the ice of winter has thawed, and spring has come, and she says: This is Aslan’s doing.

It’s not until chapter 12 — over two thirds of the way through the book — that the children arrive at the place of the Stone Table, hear the sound of music off to their right, and ‘turning in that direction, they saw what they had come to see.’ …

There is Aslan, standing in the centre of a crowd of creatures, all grouped round him in a semi-circle …

With Aslan himself, the Beavers and the children don’t know what to do or say when they finally encounter him.

*I quote*: People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time.

For when they tried to look at Aslan’s face they just caught a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes; and then they found they couldn’t look at him and went all trembly. . . .

His voice was deep and rich and somehow took the fidgets out of them. They now felt glad and quiet and it didn’t seem awkward to them to stand and say nothing.

Without wishing to spoil it for anyone who hasn’t read it or seen it, chapters 13 and 14 reach their climax when Aslan sacrifices himself in order to save Edmund.

My friend, a priest, read Aslan’s death to the children and then symbolically left the book for three days, to let the children absorb the actuality of his dying.

They approached chapter 15 with the sort of profound sadness children do so well, until they saw, through Susan and Lucy’s eyes, what Lewis calls the Deeper Magic: There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.’

Too good to be true? Or too good **not** to be true?

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Happy Easter!

**Amen**