



Of Seeds and Flowers



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THE ARRIVAL - CHRISTMAS 2015

The noise and the bustle began earlier than usual in the village. As night gave way to dawn, people were already on the streets. Vendors were positioning themselves on the corners of the most heavily traveled avenues. Store owners were unlocking the doors to their shops. Children were awakened by the excited barking of the street dogs and the complaints of donkeys pulling carts.

The owner of the inn had awakened earlier than most in the town. After all, the inn was full, all the beds taken. Every available mat or blanket had been put to use. Soon all the customers would be stirring and there would be a lot of work to do.

One's imagination is kindled thinking about the conversation of the innkeeper and his family at the breakfast table. Did anyone mention the arrival of the young couple the night before? Did anyone ask about their welfare? Did anyone comment on the pregnancy of the girl on the donkey? Perhaps. Perhaps someone raised the subject. But, at best, it was raised, not discussed. There was nothing that novel about them. They were, possibly, one of several families turned away that night. Besides, who had time to talk about them when there was so much excitement in the air? Augustus did the economy of Bethlehem a favor when he decreed that a census should be taken. Who could remember when such commerce had hit the village?

No, it is doubtful that anyone mentioned the couple's arrival or wondered about the condition of the girl. They were too busy. The day was upon them. The day's bread had to be made. The morning's chores had to be done. There was too much to do to imagine that the impossible had occurred. God had entered the world as a baby.

Yet, were someone to chance upon the sheep stable on the outskirts of Bethlehem that morning, what a peculiar scene they would behold. The stable stinks like all stables do. The stench of urine, dung, and sheep reeks pungently in the air. The ground is hard, the hay scarce. Cobwebs cling to the ceiling and a mouse scurries across the dirt floor. A more lowly place of birth could not exist. Off to one side sit a group of shepherds. They sit silently on the floor: perhaps perplexed, perhaps in awe, no doubt in amazement. Their night watch had been interrupted by an explosion of light from heaven and a symphony of angels. God goes to those who have time to hear him—so on this cloudless night he went to simple shepherds.

Near the young mother sits the weary father. If anyone is dozing, he is. He can't remember the last time he sat down. And now that the excitement has subsided a bit, now that Mary and the baby are comfortable, he leans against the wall of the stable and feels his eyes grow heavy. He still hasn't figured it all out. The mystery of the event

puzzles him. But he hasn't the energy to wrestle with the questions. What's important is that the baby is fine and that Mary is safe. As sleep comes he remembers the name the angel told him to use ... Jesus. "We will call him Jesus." Wide awake is Mary. My, how young she looks! Her head rests on the soft leather of Joseph's saddle. The pain has been eclipsed by wonder.. She looks into the face of the baby. Her son. Her Lord. His Majesty. At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what he is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable. She can't take her eyes off him. Somehow Mary knows she is holding God. So this is he. She remembers the words of the angel. "His kingdom will never end." He looks like anything but a king. His face is prunish and red. His cry, though strong and healthy, is still the helpless and piercing cry of a baby. And he is absolutely dependent upon Mary for his well-being. Majesty in the midst of the mundane. Holiness in the filth of sheep manure and sweat. Divinity entering the world on the floor of a stable. through the womb of a teenager and in the presence of a carpenter. She touches the face of the infant-God. How long was your journey! This baby had overlooked the universe. These rags keeping him warm were the robes of eternity. His golden throne room had been abandoned in favor of a dirty sheep pen. And worshiping angels had

been replaced with kind but bewildered shepherds.

Meanwhile, the city hums. The merchants are unaware that God has visited their planet. The innkeeper would never believe that he had just sent God into the cold. And the people would scoff at anyone who told them the Messiah lay in the arms of a teenager on the outskirts of their village. They were all too busy to consider the possibility. Those who missed His Majesty's arrival that night missed it not because of evil acts or malice; no, they missed it because they simply weren't looking. *Little has changed in the last two thousand years, has it?* From: "God Came Near" by Max Ludado

A DROP OF RAIN...A BIT OF SUN

"DAT BABY JESUS - HE MAKE ME LAUGH"

Brennan Manning, in his book, *The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*, tells of an experience he had at an airport. It was just before Christmas and he was in the Chicago airport waiting to get a flight to Texas for a week-end retreat. But because of a severe storm, he and thousands of others were not going anywhere. The flights were all delayed. Public address systems were blaring, people were at the ticket counter demanding a projected departure time, children were crying, some people were just sitting and staring.

Then he noticed a middle-aged black woman cradling a child in her arms and laughing. Manning asked her, "Would you mind telling me why you're so happy?"

"Sho," she said. "Christmas is coming and dat baby Jesus---He make me laugh."

GOD BEHIND THE COUNTER

A woman dreamed she walked into a brand new shop in the marketplace and, to her surprise, found God behind the counter. "What do you sell here?" she asked. "Everything your heart desires," said God. Hardly daring to believe what she was hearing, the woman decided to ask for the best things a human being could wish for. "I want peace of mind and love and happiness and wisdom and freedom from fear," she said. Then as an afterthought, she added, "Not just for me. For everyone on earth."

God smiled, "I think: you've got me wrong, my dear, He said. "We don't sell fruits here. Only seeds."

**"Make ready for Christ the Savior",
shouts Thomas Merton, "whose smile,
like lightning, sets free the song of
everlasting glory that now sleeps in your
paper flesh; like dynamite." WOW!!!**

**What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would bring him a lamb;
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him?
Give Him my heart.**

- Christina Rossetti

SHARON'S CHRISTMAS PRAYER

She was five, sure of the facts. and recited them with slow solemnity convinced every word was revelation.

She said they were so poor they had only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to eat and they went a long way from home without getting lost.

The lady rode a donkey. The man walked and the baby was inside the lady. They had to stay in a stable with an ox and an ass (hee-hee) but the Three Rich Men found them because a star lited the roof. Shepherds came and you could pet the sheep but not feed them.

Then the baby got borned. And do you know who he was? Her quarter eyes inflated to silver dollars. The baby was God And she jumped in the air whirled round, dove into the sofa and buried her head under the cushion which is the only proper response to the Good News of the Incarnation.

-JOHN SHEA

VISION AND REALITY

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness. So God sent us a Savior. The wonder of Christmas is that the God who dwelt among us now can dwell within us.

TWENTY ONE QUESTIONS FOR MARY

1. What was it like teaching Him how to pray?
2. Who was His best friend?
3. How did you feel when you lost Him in the Temple for three days?
4. When He bumped His head, how did He respond?
5. Did you ever think , *That's God eating my soup?*
6. Did He like to go swimming?
7. What were you thinking when you changed His diaper?
8. How did you feel when you were teaching Him to use a fork or spoon?
9. Did He do well in school?
10. How did he act when He got his first haircut?
11. Did He ever come home with a black eye?
12. How did He respond when He saw other kids giggling during the service at the synagogue?
13. Did He have any pets?
14. Did the thought ever occur to you that the God to whom you were praying was asleep under your own roof?
15. Did He have any friends by the name of Judas?
16. What did He and His cousin John talk about as kids?
17. What was it like watching Him pray?
18. How did you feel when you received Him in Communion after He returned to His Father? What did you say to Him in those precious moments?
19. How did He do with the girls as a teen-ager?
20. Did He like to climb trees? -tell jokes? -skim rocks on the water? - take a bath? -comb His hair?
21. Did He ever spit out His peas? (More probably, figs)

"Though He was in the form of God, He did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself...."
Philippians, 2.6.

Thank you for your faithful love. We are most grateful for all of your financial support, your prayers, your cards of encouragement. Our prayer is that we have touched your heart in some way in 2015, and that the Child be born afresh in your beautiful heart this Christmas! Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year! Bill and Cindy

SPEAKING SOFTLY

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER - The following Christmas prayer was delivered by a U. S. Senate Chaplain, Peter Marshall on Dec. 19, 1947 in the U. S. Senate, addressed to a victorious nation recovering from World War II.

'We thank thee, O God, for the return of the wondrous spell of this Christmas season that brings its own sweet joy into our jaded and troubled hearts.

Forbid it. Lord that we should celebrate without understanding what we celebrate, or, like our counterparts so long ago, fail to see the star or to hear the song of glorious promise.

As our hearts yield to the spirit of Christmas, may we discover that it is Thy Holy Spirit who comes-not a sentiment but a power- to remind us of the only way by which there may be peace on earth and good will among men.

May we not spend Christmas, but keep it, that we may be kept in its hope, through Him who emptied Himself in coming to us that we might be filled with peace and joy in returning to God. Amen".

"If Christmas didn't already exist we would have had to invent it. There has to be at least one day in the year to remind us we're here for something else besides our general cussedness." Eric Severeid

"THERE IS SUCH RICHNESS AND GOODNESS IN THE NATIVITY THAT IF WE SHOULD SEE AND DEEPLY UNDERSTAND, WE SHOULD BE DISSOLVED IN PERPETUAL JOY." MARTIN LUTHER

