

## ***– Still at the manger...***

Dec 26, 2021

Imagine an impromptu gathering – the house suddenly swelled by well-wishers and curious passers-by; Imagine the cheerful chaos of a dozen voices each competing to tell a version of the same story – all seeking affirmation that what they had seen and heard had real meaning. Imagine the rush of noise; the questions and exclamations of delight. Think of the fantastic and fanciful descriptions that prompted those shepherds to abandon their duties and intrude on that tired trio in a borrowed room...This is how we imagine the first Christmas.

The family – displaced by government decree. The rules of the day called them to Joseph's ancestral town, and while they may have found relatives there, they were guests...now receiving guests. And for all the joy that comes with the birth of a baby, there is stress – exhaustion – travel-weariness – uncertainty. Very human reactions to a very common event.

And here we are – making our way through these strange celebrations. Too often this year we have been reminded that nothing is as we imagine it should be. We feel displaced, exhausted, anxious and unsettled – for much different reasons than Joseph and Mary felt these same emotions – and perhaps it is helpful to remember that the first Christmas, angelic choirs notwithstanding, was a tenuous time for those involved.

Today, I invite you to sit with Mary in the blessed aftermath. The shepherds have run jubilant into the streets – perhaps Joseph has delicately guided them out into the night. For this brief time, let it be just Mary and Jesus; weary, yet charged with the secret delight that many new mothers discover when they discover themselves alone with their newborn for the first time.

Mary - for the moment – sits wondering, soothing, resting, nursing, adoring...and remembering.

Remembering her own encounter with the Holy; her conversations with Elizabeth; her moments of doubt; the long, tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. She has heard and imagined the best and the worst for her child in all this time (for that is what mothers do) and now, face with the beautiful reality of this precious gift, I imagine her treasuring the quiet – rejoicing in the reality – and truly, truly thankful.

## ***– Still at the manger...***

Dec 26, 2021

It seems to me that thankfulness is often the first casualty of our Christmas celebrations.

Lost in the noise and the preparation – hidden by the travel plans, the uncertainties, the over-indulgence and the consequences of same – lost in all that, or at least relegated to some side-table in our grand buffet of Christmas exuberance, is gratitude/thankfulness.

So here at the manger with Mary – mindful of the stories we've heard and those we have yet to tell; glad of the house that is only momentarily emptied; sure that God is at work in both chaos and calm – let us be thankful.

Thankful for the support we've found and the connections we've made in spite of everything. Thankful for the love that finds us at Christmas even when we're skeptical and cynical and lost in the chaos that manages to claim a little part of us every December. Thankful for surprise plates of baked goods (and an excuse to ignore our dietary habits for the sake of good neighbours and great cooking) Thankful for good memories that sustain us in dark times. Just thankful.

Mary, sitting quietly next to the manger, knows that the quiet won't last – so do we. The next bit of chaos will find us soon enough, whether we are ready or not. So just claim your own 'manger moment' when you can. Close your eyes and let yourself smile a little (or a lot.) Thank God for the gift of that brief, quiet moment, when, against all odds you saw Christmas for what it really was: the introduction of divine peace, offered as an answer to the chaos of our own making.

Rejoice and be glad, God is with us.

Merry Christmas.