

Dec 24 2010 Xmas Eve Luke's Gospel

O HOLY NIGHT

It's the story that never stops. It's like the Energizer bunny that keeps on moving on. He never runs out of energy as he beats his drum. He should have been there at the manger when Christ was born to help the little drummer boy play a melody of songs to the King of kings. The Christmas story is the same way. It's the gift that keeps on giving... giving light...giving joy...giving peace...giving loves...giving hope. Every Christmas Eve we hear the Christmas story about the travels of Mary and Joseph as they go to take part in the census. We think about the many innkeepers who told them, and perhaps so many others, that there was no place for them to stay. The inns were full. But, in God's plan there was one innkeeper whose heart was touched by a pregnant woman about to give birth. "I have no place for you in here. But if you would like, I have a place where the animals stay. It's not much, just a place to get you out of the cold, a place you can build a small fire to warm yourselves, a place where you can be alone as your wife delivers the baby. You are welcome to that place for the night." the innkeeper may have said. So Joseph pulls their beast of burden a little further on till he finds that place the innkeeper talked about. Joseph helps Mary down from the donkey, sets up a bale of hay for her to rest on as he prepares the place for the birth of their child. He moves everything around, starts the fire going, gets some water from the trough and puts it in his water bags. He dries out the trough, puts some hay in it to make a place for the baby to lie once it is born. Mary rests, lies down on the soft ground of hay and listens to the animals that are standing and kneeling around them. It's peaceful at this moment and Mary is glad not to be bouncing around on their donkey. It was getting uncomfortable. Joseph pushes the hay aside to make room for Mary's birth. It is getting colder and darker. Not much light comes from the fire

Joseph tries to keep going by adding a few sticks he has gathered up. Got to be careful not to burn down this place. That wouldn't be good. Joseph walks out to stretch for a few minutes and looks to the heavens and sees so many bright stars. They seem to be twinkling a little more this night. He could hear the sounds coming from the village as more travelers are turned away and try to find a place to bed down for the night. He thanks God for this place, though not much, but it is safe and warm, and the animals though the smell isn't so great, give it a little more heat from their bodies. The cows, the sheep, the donkey keep watch over Mary as she rests from the journey while Joseph stretches and talks to God.

“God, is this the night? Is this the place? Is Mary going to deliver tonight? I'm scared and all alone. I was hoping to make it further, to find a nice place where Mary could deliver. But Father, you heard one keeper after the other telling me there was no room. I had to beg for this place. Thank you God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, my God, for giving us this place, even if it is a place where animals bed down. It's a little smelly, but it's warm and cozy. Father what kind of a father will I be for your Son? I'm just a carpenter working with my hands to create things. You have destined him for great things. How will I be able to help him? You, you have created the world and now, even now through the power of the Holy Spirit, you have created a baby, a boy, your Son in Mary's womb. Can't explain how, but you did it. You who created the world out of nothing can create a child in the womb of one who has never been with a man. Amazing. It defies logic. But after all, that's why you are God. Give me strength Father, when your son gets bigger to teach him your ways and prepare him the best I can to be ready for your calling to come out of the darkness into the light in order to bring salvation to all who will receive him. Father, I hear Mary groaning. Excuse me Father, got to go take care of things. I think she is ready...I can hear her calling me, the birth pains must be getting closer,

so Father in heaven, God of all, help me to deliver the Deliverer of the world. Bless us, be with Mary.”

And with that, Joseph walks back into the manger, holds hands with Mary, offers up a prayer for this time, tells Mary to ‘push’ and like always in God’s timing, Joseph receives in his hands the Son of God. And Mary rejoices as she looks down to see her Son, and beams with delight for the son God promised her that would transform the world has been born and already this child is transforming her and Joseph’s lives. Angel voices could be heard as Joseph wraps God’s Son in clothing, walks out into the open night sky, sees not only all the stars twinkling but one bright star stretching from heavens’ door to the manger that was giving a great light. Joseph holds baby Jesus up and says to God the Father, “Father, into your hands I give you your Son, be with him and with Mary and with me and with the whole world.” Joseph walks among the animals surrounding the manger and holds the baby for them to see and says, “Behold the Lamb of God who shall take away the sins of the whole world. For God so loved the world that he gave us his Son so that all who will believe in him shall have eternal life.” And with that Joseph brings Jesus to Mary to nurse and to hold as they rejoice together as they hear music in the background saying, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king.” They smile, and Mary rests from her labor while Jesus sleeps in his crib.

The donkey speaks and says to the other animals, “I carried his mother uphill and down. I carried his mother to Bethlehem town.” The cow who had been bedded down for some time chimed in, “I gave him my manger for his bed. I gave him hay for a pillow for his head.” Not to be outdone the sheep that seemed to have wandered in from a herd in Bethlehem said, “I gave him my wool for his blanket warm, he wore my coat on Christmas morn.” Then a dove that flew in from who

knows where looked down from his perch from one of the beams and said, “I cooed him to sleep that he could not cry, we cooed him to sleep my mate and I.” Thus all the beasts, by some good spell, in the stable dark were glad to tell of the gifts they gave Emmanuel. Yes the gifts they gave Emmanuel.”

Meanwhile in the fields not too far away that same bright star seemed to get the attention of some poor shepherds as they began to bed themselves down after taking care of their herds. It was a peaceful night when all of a sudden rose a loud clatter, voices from heaven proclaiming to them, “Glory to God on high for today in the city of Bethlehem a baby who is Christ the King, Savior of the world.” And the angel’s voices sang loud with anthems so sweet, “Hark!” they sang with their eastern voices, “Glory to the new born king. Peace on earth, and mercy mile, God and sinners reconciled! Joyful all ye nations rise. Join the triumph of the skies; with the angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem... Light and life to all he brings, raised with healing his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth.” “Hark!” the herald angels sang, “Glory to the new born King.”

What a wonderful Holy night it was. God’s Son born that we no more may die....born to raise us from the earth to give us eternal life with him in heaven...born to give us a second birth, a new birth leaving the old sinful life behind and finding a new life with a fresh start knowing of God’s forgiveness.

What a Holy night it was. Listen as I read from the hymn “O Holy Night.”

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining;
it is the night of the dear Savior’s birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the Spirit felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;

led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
with glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
O'er the world a star is sweetly gleaming,
now come the wise men from out of the Orient land.
The King of king's lay thus lowly manger;
in all our trials born to be our friends.
He knows our need; our weakness is no stranger,
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
with all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

The shepherds came...the wise men came and they fell on their knees that night, not in desperation, but in adoration to worship God's only begotten Son who came as a gift from God. Though they presented him with their gifts, it was they who received gifts. They received the gifts of hope, peace, forgiveness, joy, happiness, and top it all off, the gift of salvation. For one day this little baby would grow up and die on the cross, be placed in a tomb and three days later rise again in victory and in glory and shall not only live forever but will reign forever and ever.

And that my friends are the Christmas story that should be told every Christmas...dare I say it, every Sunday...even every day. Those who came that first Christmas bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, and incense and of myrrh.

Our choir sang, “Come see the child, he is here by the fire...Look in his face and see the world’s salvation...Open your eyes now the holy star is rising rays of light will shine to touch your soul. Open your heart to the glory and the wonder. Feel the holy peace.”

The lead into tonight’s choir selection states, “We can join the magi in their giving as we draw near to the Lord and open the treasures of our hearts. Instead of gold frankincense and myrrh we bring our gifts of love, adoration and praise as we bow to worship the King of Kings, the Prince of Peace.”

O come all ye faithful for unto you has been born the Savior of the world. Receive from him the gift of life for ever more.