
Holy Family@Christmas

2020



Like the waves of the ocean, our life ebb and flow with the currents of life's situations. After four weeks of Advent preparations and Christmas celebrations amidst one of the world's worst plague, Covid-19, we are soon entering 2021. How has this Christmas been through the different lens and landscapes? As Christians, we could imagine this Christmas in light of the first Christmas at Bethlehem. Focusing on the Christ-Child then and now. Then, it was Mary, Joseph, some animals, the hay, the manger, the cave, the cold, the shepherds – no thrills and frills. Bare minimum.

Christmas 2020 now with the Pandemic, family visits and celebration is limited to 5 visitors per household. Could this time bring us in spirit to Bethlehem? To listen attentively to the soft, gentle voices of Mary and Joseph as they welcome the Christ-Child and wrap Him in swaddling clothes. What were they saying to each other? How did they welcome the Christ-Child? With hugs and kisses? With prayers of thanksgiving to God for the safe delivery of the Christ-Child? The Holy Family of Nazareth!

Simple, humble, quiet, content, grateful, thankful for a safe delivery was the atmosphere in that manger 2020 years ago. Could we not enter into the same sentiments, despite the pandemic? One way to do so is to turn our eyes on Jesus, shift our focus to the manger and spend some quiet moments to ponder and to reflect. How a mighty God, King of the universe chose to come to earth in this little way, to be born poor and humble. Hiding His Godhead and Majesty so that all people can approach this Christ-Child without fear or threats.

Mary and Joseph definitely experienced the uncertainties before, during and after this holy birth. What would they feed baby Jesus with? How long would they be in this cold, damp, smelly manger? Where would they go? How would they avoid the dangers and threats of Herod after the three wise men warned them?

Today, in our own Christmas tide, in our world today, can we not also identify with some of these sentiments too? What will 2021 be like? How long will the pandemic last? When can we travel to visit our family and friends overseas? How safe will it be? Will there be jobs for us and our families? When will our churches be full once again? Can we sing praises aloud again, as did the Psalmists of old?

Mary and Joseph pondered all these uncertainties of life and placed their complete trust and faith in God who had proven to keep His promises from of old.

Mary and Joseph were well versed in the Torah and Old Testament scripture, knowing that the Lord always keeps His promises. No matter how long they had to wait, they waited patiently for God to lead and guide, to protect and provide. Can we not do likewise? Wait in patient humility. Life is difficult then, for Mary and Joseph, life is difficult now, for us too. Indeed, the first line of the book, *"The Road Less Travelled"* starts with – *"Life is difficult"*.

So many of us are used to comfort food, comfort life, comfort zone, all things comfortable. In the dictionary, comfort means, *'a state of physical ease and freedom from pain or constraint.'* Yet we all know that this 'comfort' will not last forever. At some stage in our life we are confronted with a roadblock, an obstacle, a crisis, a difficulty. But we know these too will not last forever. For God comes to save His people.

God never promise us a life of comfort but He promise to give us the strength and grace to walk through the difficult passages of life, like Mary and Joseph. God could have chosen a more comfortable place for the birth of the Christ-Child, yet He allowed Mary and Joseph to find a place, a smelly manger and God honours that place and transforms shame and disgrace to a sacred space filled with His abundant graces.

Similarly, God comes and dwells in our hearts and homes, not only on Christmas day, but each time we prepare a place for Him in our hearts and homes – which may be dirty with sin, stinking with addictions, chaotic in this pandemic, but as long as we invite Him, He comes. Not only does He come, but He will transform us into His image. As St Paul so eloquently said in his letter to the Philippians, *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."* (Philippians 3:20-21)

A Russian Christmas Story

For Always (by Will Fish)

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments and a large orphanage. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage. They relate the following story in their own words:

It was nearing the holiday season, 1994, time for our orphans to hear for the first time the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small square paper, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No coloured paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel (cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia) were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from felt brought from the United States. The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked to be about 6 years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger.

Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the boy why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger. Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, "And when Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, "If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?" And Jesus told me, "If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me." "So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him - for always."

As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him - **FOR ALWAYS.**





What was our Christmas like?
Did we reach out to the marginalised?
Did we reconcile with a family member? A Church member? A friend?



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