

# Christmas Night

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus  
that the whole world should be enrolled.  
This was the first enrollment,  
when Quirinius was governor of Syria.  
So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town.  
And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth  
to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem,  
because he was of the house and family of David,  
to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.  
While they were there,  
the time came for her to have her child,  
and she gave birth to her firstborn son.  
She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger,  
because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields  
and keeping the night watch over their flock.  
The angel of the Lord appeared to them  
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,  
and they were struck with great fear.  
The angel said to them,  
"Do not be afraid;  
for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy  
that will be for all the people.  
For today in the city of David  
a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord.  
And this will be a sign for you:  
you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes  
and lying in a manger."  
And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel,  
praising God and saying:  
"Glory to God in the highest  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

*Lk 2:1-14*

Saint Luke's narrative of the Gospel of Nativity is very specific. It reads like a modern techno-thriller. We hear names of the Roman officials that help us to pin this moment in time and the names of towns and regions that direct us to a very specific location. The whole story sounds like a description of a cosmic event. The reader is made to feel like a comet flying from a distant space to a specific tiny point outside Bethlehem. It flies through space and through time.

The trajectory ends on a little newborn child that is laying in a manger in the arms of his mother.

Then, a wave of joy and glory spreads from that very point through the whole of creation. It feels like the whole universe is trying to respond to this astonishing arrival. The shepherds and the flocks are happy, the angels appear to them, and together they find themselves in a crowded cosmos of creatures celebrating the little baby. Hosanna in the highest!

Beautiful picture, very familiar; and rightly celebrated around the world. Yet this breathtaking description has a detail that often escapes its readers; a detail that speaks powerfully and loudly by its absence. The most important question that we would ask with any other baby is really obvious: Where is the father?

Exactly! Where is he? Is he missing the birth of his first son? Is he hiding? Is he camouflaged because he fears that we might get scared?

If we want to see the Father, all we have to do is to listen to the angels and the shepherds. All the witnesses are singing: "Glory to God in the highest." They are praising God because they know, they feel, they see his powerful presence.

This glorious heavenly presence of the Father adds a new depth to the whole picture. The scene of the mother and child sitting in a forgotten manger is not only a depiction of the simplicity and holiness of Jesus and Mary, it also becomes a place of the greatest gift ever offered to the world. God, the Creator of the Universe, in his endless joy and happiness, puts in our hands his only son, who was just born as a human being. Like every father, he is happy and proud and wants us to be equally happy and equally in love with his little baby. He knows the rest of the story and he wants it to unfold. Yet, in this moment in Bethlehem, the Father wants us to join him in his happiness. He wants us to share in his happiness because without it, we would never find ourselves in what he prepared for us. This very joy of the Father will echo through every word and everything that the Son will accomplish.

Hosanna in the highest! Let us rejoice today. Let us rejoice more than ever in our lives. The Son is born and he is the Savior of the world. He will unveil for us the depths of the love which the Father has for us. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."