

Lying in a Manger

If Jesus were born in 2020, where would his birth take place? Better yet, Jesus is being born in 2020. He is always coming as the Light in the darkness. He is constantly uniting himself to humanity and filling us with new life. So where is he being born today? Where do we experience the miracle of his divinity in our humanity?

To answer that question, we need to go back to the lesson of the first Christmas. The angels told the shepherds, ***“This will be the sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”*** (Lk. 2:12). In telling the story of Jesus’ birth, three times Luke mentions the ***“infant lying in a manger.”*** This was the sign from God. It was a striking image. Imagine what it was like for the shepherds to hear that ***“a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord”*** (Lk. 2:11). Then to hear that the Savior is lying in a feed trough.

Such contrasting images! Imagine how mind-boggling that was. No one ever dreamed that God would become man. Even less, that the Son of God would be laid in a manger, a feed trough for animals. Almighty God surprised us by humbly laying his Son in a manger. The majesty of God dwells in poverty. After beholding the Son of God lying in a manger, we should not be surprised when he kneels like a slave to wash our feet.

A great communicator uses striking images or a memorable story. On Christmas, we have a fascinating story with an unforgettable image. The Savior of the world is laid in a manger. God sent his Son not only to be *with us* in poverty, but also to be *incarnated* or *enfleshed* in human poverty. Before he died, Jesus said that he would continue to be incarnated in frail humanity. He told us that we care for him whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, or visit the sick and imprisoned. He said, ***“Whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me”*** (Mt. 25:40).

Jesus is constantly taking on human flesh. So where is he being born today? Where is he *‘lying in a manger’*? Christ is lying in a million mangers.

Healthcare workers meet Christ as they visit patients lying in hospital beds. Nursing Home employees care for Christ in the residents at their facilities suffering isolation. Parents caring for sick children or kids with special needs experience his holy presence. They marvel at the infant lying in the manger. Parents, nurses, doctors, and nursing home employees are like the shepherds, as they see Christ lying in a million mangers. This is the Christmas miracle. ***“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”*** (Jn. 1:14).

As elderly couples care for one another, particularly when a spouse needs constant attention due to mental or physical infirmity, they care for Christ incarnated in their spouse. Those advocating for the strangers among us are privileged to welcome Christ in faith-filled immigrants humbly shining with his Light. Those doing prison ministry sense his mysterious presence in the inmates whose lives are broken. Eucharistic Ministers encounter Christ as they visit the homebound.

In November, I asked the priests to send me a few names of the homebound in each of their parishes. I have had wonderful conversations with them. I spoke with a man caring for his wife who had a brain aneurism. Because of Covid-19, they are isolated. I asked him how they were doing. Actually, I asked him several times because he was hard of hearing. He responded, ***“Really, we are doing well. Yes. We have to deal with a few things. But we are doing well.”*** The homebound are so upbeat and grateful. They amaze me.

I spoke to a lady who had a stroke seven years ago. She is living alone, and her son recently died. I asked her if she had a spiritual lesson for me. She said, *“I only live for today. When you have had a stroke, you realize that you might not be alive in two weeks. I only live for today.”* She reminded me of the call to be humble, to depend on God each day and not worry about tomorrow.

I have been inspired in these conversations. Those calls have brightened the dark winter nights. The homebound have faith and resilience. Through them, I have experienced the Light of Christ shining in the darkness. I want to thank them for the beautiful things that they have shared with me. Elderly people are often ignored, yet they have treasures to share with society.

I am asking every healthy family to reach out to three isolated families or individuals. In your visit, ask them to share with you a spiritual lesson. When I ask them for a spiritual lesson, they are often hesitant. But they have treasures to share – riches of wisdom, faith, and perseverance.

A few nights ago, I called a lady whose husband died in a car accident last November. One of their sons died in his youth when he fell in a canyon, and a second son died due to medical issues as a young adult. She said, *“I learned to accept those deaths, even though I did not understand them. I trusted God’s love and accepted what happened.”* Even though her husband died suddenly six weeks ago, she was filled with gratitude for 58 years of marriage to a wonderful man. Acceptance combined with trust in God and gratitude for all the good in life. Those were her lessons.

It has been a rather dark year. We could find a million reasons to complain. Or we could rejoice at Christ lying in a million mangers.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn. 1:5). This Christmas take time to kneel at the manger and see the Christ child beaming with Light. Marvel at the presence of Christ dwelling in weak people emanating his Light. Thank God for how the mystery of Christ is present in the least brothers and sisters of his. Thank God for how his selfless love shines out in all those who care for the least. His light shines in their generosity, kindness, and compassion. It shines in their tireless dedication and selfless service.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” The darkness cannot overcome it. The darkness will never overcome it. Rejoice in the Light!