

Christmas 2016
While they were there, she gave birth to her firstborn son

*The seed of God's life that took root in Mary and was birthed into the world
was the compassion and mercy of the Adult Christ*

Background

The word, Christmas, is derived from the Middle English "Christemasse" and is first recorded in 1038. Nativity scenes are known from 10th-century Rome and were popularized by Saint Francis of Assisi from 1223. Christmas carols emerged in the late eighteenth century: "Deck The Halls" in 1784 and "Jingle Bells" in 1857. The name, Santa Claus, comes from the Dutch "Sinterklaas" which means St. Nicholas, a Bishop of Myra, in modern-day Turkey, noted for his care of children and the giving of gifts.

Christmas then and now

Christmas is about the birth of the baby Jesus two thousand years ago, and it is more than that. It is also a birthing into the world of the compassion and mercy of the Adult Christ today. Christmas is still happening now - the ongoing revelation of God in the universe, the materializing of God into the world. God's revealing God's self into our lives is happening all the time, even though often enough we miss it. But we don't want to miss it because the event is always accompanied by joy. Whenever we are filled with joy, we just received another birthing revelation of God.

I remembering experiencing this once as a little boy. My slightly older sister was preparing for a school Christmas play. One night, she sang the entire hymn she was preparing - in her sleep. It continues to be wonderful to remember - this sweet little angelic girl's voice singing:

*"Away in a manger no crib for his bed. The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the heavens look down where he lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay."*

Christmas

Francis Thompson, an English poet who lived in the early twentieth century, penned a poem titled, "*The Hound of Heaven*." It describes his encounter with God who was trying to reveal God's own Self to him. This is a portion from that poem.

"I fled him down the nights and down the days; I fled him down the arches of the years; I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind; and in the midst of tears I hid from him, and up vistaed hopes I sped; And shot precipitated Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears, From those strong feet that followed, followed after. But with unhurrying chase and unperturbed pace, Deliberate speed, majestic instancy, They beat - and a voice beat more instant than the feet - 'All things betray thee who betrayest me'."

Christmas

I have kept an article that appeared in the "America Magazine," December 14, 2009. It was titled, "*Room in the Inn.*" This is a portion of that story:

"In the casting for the pre-school nativity play, my granddaughter was chosen to be the donkey. I was thrilled. The donkey is something very special to me, a simple, warm-breathed, burden-bearing donkey, carrying its precious cargo to the inn at Bethlehem.

"Thoughts of the donkey turned my attention to a couple who live on our street. I'll call them Miriam and Joe. Their's is their own Nativity story. They are as normal a couple as it gets. They have a grown family and are caring for their small granddaughter so their daughter can continue to work, all while struggling in today's political and economic climate. Earlier this year, they were accepted as foster parents for children who were sick, abandoned or abused. They were willing to take any children of any age and degree of disability or difficulty. Three troubled teenagers arrived for an indefinite period.

"They spoke hardly any English. They were refugees from Afghanistan. Their father had been killed in the conflict, and their mother smuggled them out of the country. After six months crossing Asia and Europe in a truck, they arrived in England as refugees. I saw their sad and gentle eyes and saw the face of another middle-Eastern child long ago, fleeing conflict and bringing peace.

"Next came two little boys whose father left them and their mother was doing drugs. They too were gently laid into Joe and Miriam's "stable," where their deep wounds were tended by loving hands until their own family could look after them. There were no shepherds, no wise men, just a little taste of tenderness from caring strangers.

"About six weeks go, a 6-week old baby girl was taken into their inn who had been assaulted by her natural family, and along with her, her 15-year old mother who had also suffered abuse and domestic violence. This teenage mom is a child herself, still in shock and badly needing Mary's parenting guidance. The baby girl now sleeps safely at night. Perhaps the angels hover over her as once they did in Bethlehem. Perhaps a lone star rises, carrying a prayer that her life might become something better than its brutal beginnings.

"Changes like that do not come down with Christmas sparkle straight from heaven. They come through the daily struggles of good people like Miriam and Joe, who labor to bring a little more love and hope and trust into the world, and who would welcome whoever the donkey brings. I pray that my own little girl grows up to be a woman with room in her heart for the ones without another human heart to beat for them."

Christmas

This is a parable of God trying to break through the armour surrounding our hearts.

“God knocks at my door seeking a home for his son. Rent is cheap, I say. I don’t want to rent, says God, I want to buy. I’m not sure I want to sell, I say, but you might come in and have a look around. I think I will, says God, I like what I see. I’ll take a couple rooms. I’d like to give you more, I say, but you see right now, I need a lot of room for myself. I know, says God, I can wait, I like what I see. Well, I say, maybe you could have a couple more rooms, I don’t need all this space. I’ll take them, says God, I like what I see. I’d like to give you more, I say, but right now is not a good time. I know, says God, I can wait. You might consider giving me the whole house some day. I wouldn’t put you out. My son would live in the house, and you would have more room than you ever had before. This I don’t understand, I say. I know, says God, I can’t explain it to you. You’ll only understand it once you give me the whole house. That’s a bit risky, I say. I’m not sure I’m ready. Think about it, says God. Too risky, I say. I know, says God, I can wait, I like what I see.”

Christmas

My brother Jesuit, Greg Boyle, who works with gangs in East L.A. tells this story:

“A Homie who works for me gave me this insight once about God. He says, ‘You know, God is that person pushing the shopping cart and going through your garbage. But sometimes, we don’t want him to go through our garbage. And he says, I want your garbage. But that’s because God recycles, he recycles our garbage and turns it into love.’” When we are disappointed in each other, we least resemble God. Disappointment seems to be the one language God does not speak. We rub people’s noses in stuff, God doesn’t. To be convinced of my own acceptance by God, I must know that I am accepted at my worst. Hence moral outrage is the opposite of God, it only polarizes, it separates what God wants united in kinship. And besides, moral outrage never leads us to solutions, it keeps us from them’.”

Christmas

This divine invitation never ceases: *“Come as you are, loved and forgiven. Why stand alone? You have no need to fear. I came to bring peace, not to condemn. Each time you fail, do you think I love you the less? Don’t run away ashamed and disheartened. Come as you are. Nothing can cool the love I have for you. All will be well. Just come as you are.”*

All Sing: “Silent Night”

Merry Christmas!