



VOCATION SPIRIT NEWS

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PRIESTS
FOR
YEAR

“A Simple Contemplation” from America Magazine

This is the continuation of a piece VSN published last week, an Advent reflection from the editors of America Magazine about the Nativity.

Can we let ourselves be vulnerable with one another, sharing our frustrations and pain? But despite its helplessness, every dependent, trusting and vulnerable infant is the repository of almost unlimited promise and potential. Even in dark times there is always the hope of something new.

Mary. It is commonplace to aver that Mary was trusting, faith-filled and holy. Most likely she was also confused. This is evident from her words to Gabriel at the Annunciation: “How can this be?” In confusing times, can we permit ourselves feelings of holy confusion without the normal attending guilt? Mary was tired. The arduous months of pregnancy, the grueling journey to Bethlehem and the unanesthetized labor would have been severely taxing. We are not at our best when we are physically tired. Finally, Mary also relies on her own experience of God, incommunicable to others, which fills her with the confidence to carry out her mission boldly in the face of confusion and weariness.



*A still shot from the movie
The Nativity Story.
Image: turnbacktgod.com*

Joseph. Given no words to speak in the Gospels, Joseph did little that is known to us; even the details of his death remain unknown. Thus, his life, like those of so many around us, is one of hiddenness. Can we see our actions as holy if they are not known by others? Can our deeds be, in Henri Nouwen’s phrase, “known by God but hidden from the world”? Joseph works. He provides the wherewithal for the care and feeding of his wife and child. Any honest labor is noble, no matter how much it pays. And Joseph worries: his initial fears for his family most likely did not subside. Like many Americans, he was caught under the heel of powers far beyond his control and was still required to struggle for his family. Can we allow ourselves worry from time to time, as even the saints did? *The world,* finally, into which Jesus was born was, like our own, riven with competing

religious factions, roiled by political controversies and marked by great economic disparities. Luke’s Gospel situates the story of Jesus’ birth in a real place with real problems. The Messiah was born in occupied territory. Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph were planning to raise Jesus, was considered a backwater town. Galilee itself was seen by other Jews as an inferior place because of the continuing presence of Gentiles there. In his book *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, the New Testament scholar Donald Senior, C.P., notes that this gave the region a “demeaning reputation in the eyes of mainline Judaism.” In short, from the beginning, the Holy Family had to deal with problems relating to politics, economics and religion—like most of us. This year, for many Americans the Christmas story may take on greater meaning and import as they look to the real-life struggles of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Entering into the scene means entering into the lives of fully human people, whose experiences can enable us to deepen our relationship with God, who is near us, with us and one of us: Emmanuel.

So, How DO I Know?



ADVENT PRAYER

(from catholic.org)

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a wonder at the [wisdom](#) and power of Your Father and ours. Receive my [prayer](#) as part of my service of the [Lord](#) who enlists me in God’s own work for justice.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a hunger for peace: peace in the world, peace in my home, peace in myself.

Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in me a joy responsive to the Father’s joy. I seek His [will](#) so I can serve with gladness, singing and love.

VOCATIONAL AND YOUNG ADULT QUICK LINKS:

thinkpriest.org

[HOW DO I KNOW?](#)

[HOUSE OF PEACE](#)

[Cardinal Stritch
Campus Ministry](#)

[Capuchin Volunteers](#)

[Jesuits](#)

~MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM VSN 2 YOU!!!

Greetings to all of my friends who read Vocation Spirit News (VSN),

I would like to thank you for your support and I ask you all to keep the entire Archdiocese Seminary Community in your prayers this holiday season. Know that everyone involved with vocations prays with you and for you—and we all ultimately gather our prayers together, seeking to journey in faith to meet our savior: born a baby in a manger.



Peace and best of Christmas celebrations to you and your loved ones! ~ Bob Spoerl :)



An English Parish Priest reflects on Christmas Carol

Of all the literature about Christmas, perhaps the best-loved is Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol. The story moves forward through the encounter of Scrooge with three ghosts: The Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come. As he journeys through time, Scrooge's legendary meanness is challenged, and he undergoes a profound change of heart.



The entire story takes place within less than 24 hours, from Christmas Eve to the morning of Christmas Day. Despite the Christmas setting, religion is hardly present. You could interpret the whole thing as a secular parable about our need to be generous and compassionate. Many in Britain today would say as much. Who needs religion for human improvement? Bah, humbug!

And yet, look again at the story. In the first chapter, this is how Dickens describes Scrooge: 'Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grind-stone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!'

Scrooge's love of money has made him not only hard-hearted, but a sinner. This is religious language. And that is not all. The key to Scrooge's change is the glimpse of his own mortality. Here, too, there is a hint of religion as Scrooge suddenly gets perspective on the worthlessness of his life. He sees that if he continues to be the person he is, no one will mourn him, no one will miss him when he is gone. To seal the message he glimpses his own gravestone. Then, in a wonderful moment of Dickensian humor, Scrooge stretches out his hand to plead with his grim guide. He clutches the hand of the ghost and begs for a second chance, only to wake up and find that he is clutching ... the bedpost. It has all been a terrible dream.

Or has it? Because it turns out to

be a life-changing experience for Scrooge. And notice what the change is. He recovers the ability to feel, and this is shown above all in his treatment of the family of a handicapped child, Tiny Tim. Scrooge shudders at the thought of their suffering because of the child's premature death. Where he was mean, he now becomes generous. Where he was closed, he now becomes open. Where he was dead, he is now alive. He sends them the biggest turkey. He goes to church. He invites himself to his nephew's house for Christmas dinner. Not only is Scrooge changed in his attitude to others, he is changed in his attitude to himself. He is born again.

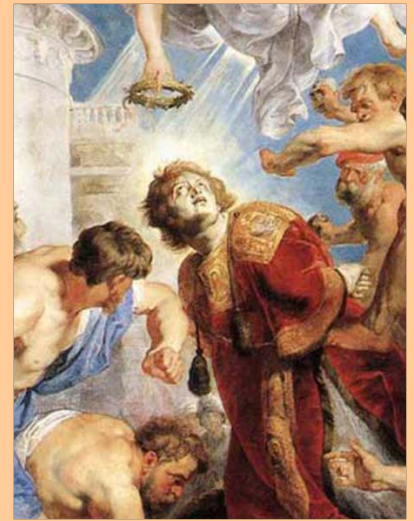
A second chance. Coming alive. Openness. Feeling the sufferings, hopes, joys of others. No wonder Dickens set the story at the heart of Christmas, because without Christmas the story would have made no sense. At Christmas we remember God coming to the world to give it another chance, to bring it new life. And God does it in a way that tugs our hearts: the glimpse of the holy child in the manger. Through this mystery, Christ present as a vulnerable infant, God invites us to recover our feelings. Deep down we know this. This is why families gather. This is why charities make appeals at this time of year. This is why hospitality is at the forefront of our thoughts. For a moment, we see the world as it could be: a place where everyone matters, a world where no one suffers alone, a world we feel for each other, and in doing so, learn to care for each other.

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December 26 marks the feast of St. Stephen

St. Stephen was martyred in Jerusalem about the year 35. He is considered both the first Christian martyr (the protomartyr) and one of the first deacons of the Christian Church.

All that we know of the life, trial, and death of St. Stephen, is found in the Book of Acts, Chapters 6 and 7. In the long chronicle of Christian martyrs, the story of Stephen stands out as one of the most moving and memorable.



Although his name is Greek (from Stephanos, meaning crown), Stephen was a Jew, probably among those who had been born or who had lived beyond the borders of Palestine, and therefore had come under the influence of the prevailing Hellenistic culture. The New Testament does not give us the circumstances of his conversion. It would seem, however, that soon after the death of the Messiah he rose to a position of prominence among the Christians of Jerusalem and used his talents especially to win over the Greek-speaking residents of the city. (from <http://www.ststephenschurch.org/lifestephen.htm>)

Of course, we know how the story of Christ will unfold. The child will grow up and become the great teacher. His death will distress us, and his resurrection is the turning-point of the world. Because we see the whole of his life, we will learn to bring the whole of our life and see it differently. For now, though, it is enough to stand with the shepherds and watch with awe. God does this for us. God loves us enough to come to us in this way. God does not come to us as a plan for self-improvement. God comes to us as a vision of love. Yes, he challenges us to live differently, but as he challenges he inspires at the same time.

God cares for us enough to come among us as one of us, as that oh-so-vulnerable child, and reaches out to us. If you feel that infant, then already Christ has opened your heart, and you will find to your astonishment that God loves you. We know, deep in our hearts, that the tender love, of this human scene is a wonderful image of God's tender love for us.

This is a love that inspires us: a love that we are now challenged to show to one another.

This is why Christmas became so great a feast: it shows us the possibilities of another, very different world. In this new world we are at peace because we are at home with God who has made his home with us.

Reflection by Fr Terry Tastard. Tastard is parish priest (pastor) of Holy Trinity, Brook Green, in the Hammersmith area of London. His new book: Ronald Knox and English Catholicism is published by Gracewing and is available on Amazon, from religious booksellers and from the publisher.

(article and picture from <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=15366>)

Merry Christmas from the Think Priest facebook page! Includes a Facebook logo and a photo of a group of men in clerical attire.