

Christmas Eve 2019
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If a shawl is draped *there*,
 some of you know what it means.
 I'll be de dramatically donning it to do a monologue sermon
 in the voice of one of the characters from the gospel.

I've never actually done that on Christmas.
 And this year I realized why:
 Of all the characters populating Luke's nativity,
 I can't decide which one speaks most urgently to me.
 Whose story I most need to hear.

I wonder . . .

Could it be Mary?
 Can I imagine having the guts to say "yes" to
 God's outrageous invitation? Not worrying what others think?

Or what about Joseph?
 Now there's someone who did the work God had given him to do
 when it would've made more sense to walk away.
 But Joseph showed up, despite the odds.

Perhaps I could be the innkeeper.
I sometimes think she gets a bum rap.
After all, we know that Bethlehem was packed
with all the migrants who'd traveled there to be registered.
What if the innkeeper was just doing the best she could
with what she had?

Or dare I be the angel, venturing out in the darkness
to share the light of glad tidings?
Would I myself have trembled even as I was telling others
not to be afraid?

But here's the thing about being an angel in this story.
You don't go it alone.
Soon enough the whole multitude of heavenly host show up
to praise God together.

Now what about those to whom the angels spoke –
those shepherds out watching their flocks by night?
I can see why they were terrified.
Would I have been tempted to cower behind a sheep
hoping it would all pass?
Doubting if I were worthy to apprehend such a message?
Or would I have been one of the shepherds energized and open to new ideas,
urging the others to go to Bethlehem to see for ourselves?

Or (and I bet you didn't see this coming)
how about taking the perspective of Emperor Augustus
whose decree provides the not-so-little detail that opens the story?
Or Quirinius the governor?

The reality is that most of us here
come from a position of relative privilege.
Whatever our limitations and struggles,
we experience more comfort and access than anyone else in this story.
We're citizens of the most powerful nation in the history of the world,
beneficiaries of the empire.

We have more in common with the likes of Augustus and Quirinius than we like to admit.

Are we willing to let the coming of Jesus into the world knock us off our thrones of privilege?
And reorient ourselves toward the most vulnerable and powerless, to whom God chose to first reveal Jesus?

Finally -- and I'm glad you're sitting down --
what about entering tonight's story through the character of Jesus?
Accepting the gospel truth
that you and I were sent into this world God so loves
in order to be the hands and feet and eyes and heart of Jesus.

The story we celebrate tonight— every last detail of it -- is our story.
Whoever we are, wherever we go,
by the grace of God
we have a role in this amazing story of God's Word become flesh,
in our flesh, in our time.

That's our story, and we're here to stick with it.

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