

## Christmas Eve

If the archangel Gabriel had appeared to me to say that I was chosen to contribute my body to the birth of the Son of God, I'd be thinking, "Yeah. Good choice." I don't know how Mary felt after Gabriel appeared to her, and I know that she never sinned throughout her life, but golly, how could you not feel like, "Wow!" If I were her during the nine months, remembering an angel's extraordinary house call to deliver this news, I'd be fantasizing about how the birth was going to take place - lots of angels flying around some palace someplace so that God's Son could enter the world in appropriate splendor. And if I'd scooped up some of that splendor, it'd be fine with me.

How does a woman over eight months pregnant feel when her husband tells her she has to travel to Bethlehem to take part in a government census? How does she feel when she gets there and starts contractions? When she learns there is no place to stay? When the closest thing to cradle she sees is the manger where farm animals eat? Again, if it were me at that moment, I'd be thinking, "This manger is not in my plans. Where is Gabriel now?"

A lot of the reflection on Christmas pertains to the humility of Christ. God did not have to save the world this way, but did it. The Word of God entered time and place, into a human body as frail and as amazing as ours, on a day when people of means, or who at least had planned ahead, took up all the rooms at the local inn. The Word of God went immediately from his immaculate mother's womb, the place of his earliest nourishment, into a manger, a place where cattle get their food. He was born in Bethlehem, a name that means House of Bread. Later Jesus would call himself the bread that came down from heaven, insisting that those who did not feed on him could not have eternal life. The word St. Luke uses for "inn" at the beginning of Jesus' life is the same word he uses for the room where Jesus wants his Last Supper. From the beginning to the end of his life, he was all about food. So, was Christ humble? Absolutely. He entered this world as humbly as you and I did, even more so. As humble as breakfast.

But let's not overlook the humility of everyone else: Joseph humbly obeying the civic ruler's command to participate in a census, no matter the inconvenience; Mary giving birth away from home, away from her own bed, in a place prepared for animals, not for humans; shepherds as homeless as many of the people on the streets of downtown Kansas City today; angels not invited to the first encounter with Mary, but now filling the skies with excitement. If I'd been there, I'd have thought, "They've seen how cool I am to make me part of this," but they were all humble, all of them.

My brothers and sisters, on this Christmas you may think you deserve gifts that will elevate the style of your life, food befitting royalty, drinks aplenty, sweets beyond measure, good grades from your teachers, respect from your relatives, a raise from your boss. And maybe you do. Maybe you deserve all those things. Joseph did. Mary did. Shepherds did. Didn't matter. They participated in something else, the birth of Christ. Well, he's here, and he ought to be enough. You may not get everything you wanted this Christmas, but you will get the greatest gift of all: God's own Son, who came to make you happy if only you would see him, eat him and believe.

Monday, December 24, 2018