

Random Thoughts On The Christmas Story

December 15, 2021

By Valerie Squires



I don't like to admit it but I have to confess that I had grown a little weary of the Christmas story as told at many carol services through readings, hymns and nativity plays. I decided this Advent, it was time to reread the Biblical accounts of the birth of Jesus and the surrounding events, to try and refresh my perspective. These are just some thoughts that struck me as I pondered these well know narratives.

It is amazing that these events were prophesised by Isaiah hundreds of years before: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given"* (Isaiah 9:6a), and then we start to see the fulfilment of this prophecy mainly in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

As we have all known from our childhood onwards, Jesus was placed in a manger, presumably not that comfortable for him and I imagine rather smelly and unhygienic - an unlikely start in the world for the Messiah. This is the first of many apparent contradictions in Jesus' life and ministry, between humility and greatness beyond our comprehension.

It struck me how bright the star would have been that the Magi navigated by without the light pollution of our times. It must have taken great humility for these wise men to worship a baby. The expensive gifts - the sight of the gold, the fragrance of the incense and myrrh - must have been overwhelming for Mary as

they were presented by these unknown important visitors from afar. I wonder what Mary and Joseph did with these gifts; were they practical and used them, or kept and treasured them? (Matthew 2:1-12)

The vision of the angel terrified the shepherds, but even more was to come; this was followed by “a great company of the heavenly host” (Luke 2:13a) praising God and telling them of the birth of Jesus. An awesome experience that I can’t imagine! Despite being overpowered by what they had seen and heard they lost no time in hurrying to see Jesus and then spreading the word to the amazement of those who listened. Would we have been so speedy to respond, or would British reserve have tempered our response?

It says that “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Surely it must have been overwhelming for this first-time mother to take this all in, but this account suggests this young woman absorbed this all in a mature and measured way.

Simeon knew his earthly life was completely fulfilled when he held Jesus in his arms – you can sense the peace and completeness for him. There was also Anna, the devout widow who gave thanks to God and passed the word round about Jesus (Luke 2:22-40).

God speaks to the people in the Christmas story in so many different ways. The Holy Spirit had spoken to Simeon about seeing Christ before he died, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, when Mary arrived at her home, with her baby leaping in her womb. There was an abundance of angels in the Christmas story not just for the shepherds but also Mary and Joseph. Dreams were also used so that Joseph and the Wise Men could hear God’s words. We know God had been working in the hearts of some of these people, such as Simeon and Anna, for many years, and more recently Mary and Joseph. We can’t know about the other participants, but we sense they were at the right point in their lives to embrace their role in fulfilling this prophecy.

God included such a variety of people in the events around Jesus’ birth: the young, the old, male, female, from different backgrounds and countries – but all focused on the Saviour. I am assuming this was one of those life-changing moments in all these people’s lives, but we don’t know for sure.

I wonder what happened to some of those characters. Did the shepherds carry on spreading the word or did their enthusiasm wear off? Did the people who had heard the shepherd’s amazing reports carry on believing what they had been told? What did the Wise Men do on the return to their country?

Did Simeon die soon after? How long did Anna live to tell more people about Jesus?

We know a little more about Joseph and Mary features again several times and we learn that she outlived her son.

Lastly, I rather like this light and imaginative poem because it points us towards the events in Jesus’ life which we remember around Easter time. We come back again to the prophecy of Isaiah: “*he will be called wonderful Counsellor. Mighty God, Everlasting father, Prince of Peace*” (Isaiah 9:6b).

What The Donkey Saw

by U.A. Fanthorpe

–

No room in the inn, of course,
And not that much in the stable,
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary,

Joseph, the heavenly host -
Not to mention the baby
Using our manger as a cot.
You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in
For love nor money.

Still, in spite of the overcrowding,
I did my best to make them feel wanted.
I could see the baby and I
Would be going places together.

(Photo by [Alexas_Fotos](#) on [Unsplash](#))