

Christmas Eve

IN THE MIDST OF THE ORDINARY

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve

Analysis by Robin Morgan

2:1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and

see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

DIAGNOSIS: The Price of Thinking Big

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Oblivious to the Extraordinary*

Once again we read these words, “there was no place for them in the inn.” How oblivious the innkeeper was! How inept the front desk clerk! Certainly if they’d been aware of who was asking for a room they’d have found space, probably even the VIP suite. Instead we can hear them sneer, “You should have made reservations ahead of time! You must have known how busy we’d be during this registration season. People like you are coming in from everywhere. You should have thought ahead!”

We may look askance at the innkeeper, but are we any different? Looking for the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary isn’t really our forte either. Our world theoretically reveres people like Mother Teresa for her devotion to the poor and dying, for her ability to see Christ in those on the margins of society. However, when push comes to shove, we prefer to be oblivious to such possibilities because they interfere with our plans, our desire for our “fair share” of whatever pie we covet.

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Fear of Being Left Behind*

The innkeeper was probably swamped with the influx of folks

coming to register and since this was the first registration, all kinds of loose ends and unforeseen circumstances would have crowded his days. He probably pushed himself hard to keep up so he didn't lose out on the possibility of repeat business in the future. He didn't want to be left behind if a new wave of officially-decreed travel was in the offing. From that perspective, making room for a young couple who probably didn't even have a credit card wouldn't have been at the top of his list.

(Okay, so the reach of credit card companies doesn't go back two thousand years. But we all know that the fear of being left behind as the world pursues wealth, power, and security has had its tendrils on the human race since the Garden. Regardless of what motivated the innkeeper, the fear of being left behind haunts us all and, when we let ourselves think about it, it drives us to pursue wealth, power and security right along with everybody around us.)

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Losing Out*

So Mary and Joseph move on. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. The young pregnant woman and her husband and their extraordinary (wrapped in the ordinary) child leave behind the inn and those within it. This will not be the birthplace of the Messiah; it's just another out-of-the-way place to lodge in a so-what little town.

God comes to us, too, and offers us the extraordinary wrapped in the ordinary, but if we're too busy, too wrapped up in planning our own big futures, God moves on.

PROGNOSIS: The Profit of Trusting Big

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The*

Extraordinary Revealed

9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

I’ll bet the innkeeper would have given Mary and Joseph a room if what happened to the shepherds had happened to him! But it didn’t, it happened to the shepherds—those other folks on the edge of society who were going about their ordinary tasks, living their ordinary lives. The Messiah, the One who had been foretold, the One who would heal the nations and bring God’s reign to fruition is wrapped in the ordinariness of a newborn child in a manger in Bethlehem. This same baby grown up, will live among his people, teach, preach and eventually die a most ordinary (albeit notorious) death so that we, who could be eternally wrapped in our own fears and worldly plans, can be set free for new life through him and given peace with God.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trust beyond Fear*

Luke tells us the shepherds were terrified at the news from the angel, no matter how eternally joyous that news is, yet they responded to the angel’s words. 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

That’s what trust is all about. Not merely assenting with our heads and mouths, but living on the promises that God offers to us, over and over again. The extraordinary becomes manifest in

our own lives when we take the steps God sets before us. Christ has unwrapped us from our bondage, now it's our turn to walk into the freedom that he's made available to us.

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Ordinary Sharing in the Extraordinary*

17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. The shepherds took up the angels' job—the ordinary shared in the extraordinary by telling everyone they met about this child. People were amazed, but who knows who actually trusted the news? We can hope the innkeeper got swept up in the joy.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. And then the shepherds returned to the ordinariness of their lives, but with a new outlook on themselves and the world. Praising and glorifying God became their way of life as it can be for us. We can live our lives looking through the lens of our crucified and risen Messiah, the One born in the midst of the ordinary so that we might be made extraordinary for all eternity. That is, indeed, Joy to the World!