

The Shepherds Were Sinners

Feast of Mary, Mother of God- Luke 2: 16-21- January 1, 2017

If we know anything about the story of the birth of Jesus we know that those who came to see him first were not the elite or favored of the community. The people who first arrived at the manger to see the baby Jesus were shepherds living in the fields. These people were considered sinners, the unclean and outcast of that culture. It would be as if Jesus were born on May's Island in Cedar Rapids and all the homeless living under the bridges came to view the newborn King. These were people who smelled bad, had no voice within the world and lived a lonely and nomadic life.

“The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

Mary and Joseph were part of this lower cast of people as well. They too were ignored and marginalized by the society in which this baby was born. They were poor travelers who eventually became refugees in Egypt. They were denied lodging and took shelter in what was probably an unsanitary and cold shelter for animals. This is probably what Mary reflected on in her experience. How is God present in this moment? How might God make good on all of this reality? How might my child be the Son of God? And yet, this is exactly what God had planned from the beginning that God would come to sinners (all of us) to re-establish the relationship lost in the act of the Original Sin. It is not surprising that the shepherds were the first to meet the infant Christ.

Today we celebrate this great feast that recognizes and affirms Mary's role in salvation history. Her role in Jesus' birth was debated and considered in the early church. Not everyone thought her role was anything more than a means to the end. Yet, the Church took on this debate, labeling her as *Theotokos*, which means God-bearer, sometime around the 3rd or 4th century.

Catholic theology has always treated her with great respect and honor. We understand that her role to be the mother of the Christ was an act of free will, not something that God forced upon her. Her decision and acceptance was based in a God-centered life, a life where one spends time “pondering and reflecting” on the Word of God, taking time to marvel at the presence of God in the mundane and messy aspects of our lives.

On our part, we “shepherds” must be willing to find our way to the manger, to bend a knee and marvel, ponder and reflect at what has taken place. Then like those first shepherds, we must go out **“glorifying and praising God for all they (we) had heard and seen...”** Yes, the shepherds were sinners but that is exactly who God trusted with the Good News. God trusts you and me too.

Merry Christmas!


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