

Luke 2:1-14, Christmas Eve 2014

What a beautiful picture we usually paint of this event we celebrate today; the birth of a baby named Jesus who during his lifetime changed the world forever.

If you go to google and type in “nativity paintings by famous artists” you will be given more possibilities for your viewing pleasure than you can ever explore.

I noticed there are some characteristics that seem to be fairly common among those paintings,

although to the trained eye the techniques used by the artists may vary greatly.

Among those characteristics are

- the adoration and love in Mary’s face or pose, or expressed in the way she holds or touches the baby Jesus.
- Then there is the ever present Joseph, watching over Mary and the baby in wonder of it all.
- Angels are frequently included as prominent figure in the scenes.
- Lighting seems to be a characteristic used in many of the paintings to give the scene a sense of the holiness of the occasion, presence of the divine.
- This baby Jesus is, of course, the central point, the central character in each and every one of these paintings.

Actual paintings are not the only way in which the picture is painted.

The way we tell the story and sing the songs of Jesus' birth will paint a picture in your minds that pretty much falls in line with the actual paintings by these great artists.

It is all usually enough to make it possible for you to overlook the real circumstances under which this birth has taken place.

On the day Jesus was born the world was not as peaceful a place as we might think,

and Joseph and Mary's lives were not as easy as these pictures we paint may depict.

Returning to our gospel text we can learn some more about how different this may have all been from the way we like to envision it.

The first observation we make is that the government has called for a registration of all the citizens during the time while Mary was waiting to deliver her baby.

This didn't effect just Joseph and Mary, but all the population.

This command from the government caused many people to have to travel from the towns where they lived to the town where their ancestors had settled to properly register.

As a consequence the roadways were probably heavily traveled, which may not have been a bad thing for Joseph and Mary.

It would have given them company and protection along the way.

but as Joseph and Mary found out when they arrived in Bethlehem, there were way to few places to stay to accommodate such crowds.

For Joseph and Mary the trip was long: 95 miles.

That would be a good month's walk at best for a woman who was expecting a child.

But even riding on a donkey would not cut that much time off the trip, maybe just a little wear and tear.

So the world was in turmoil.

Joseph and Mary's life was in turmoil also.

As we continue to read our gospel story and remember the parts of the story that came earlier in Luke's gospel the picture becomes a little more clear.

Mary is single and expecting; not a good situation to be in at all during that period in history.

She and Joseph are engaged but had not yet married.

The scrutiny of their families must have been intense, not to mention neighbors and friends.

The journey is long and tough, but they arrive in Bethlehem only to find that there is no place for them to stay except in a stable out behind the inn.

It is right at this point that I always think it is a little curious that there is no family to stay with in Bethlehem, the town that is Joseph's home of origin.

Is there no family around, or is it the baby out of wedlock issue again?

We don't know but this couple is obviously on their own.

Shortly after arriving it is time for the baby to be born to this unwed teen who is probably terrified as she settles into the midst of the squalor of a stable behind the inn of this small town, Bethlehem!

There is no mid-wife so just imagine guys, Joseph may have had to help delivery this baby.

Oh, the hot water and the clean rags, and lets see what else does he need? I don't even know.

And ladies, lets be real. How did women ever deliver babies without a maternity ward? That could not have been fun,

not to mention the pain of child birth, yes with this one like every other birth.

The world was in turmoil. Joseph and Mary's personal life was in as much turmoil as the rest of the world.

Here is the amazing thing about all this.

“to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

In the middle of the turmoil, in the middle of everyday life he comes,
without fanfare, largely without notice with the exception of a few people.

Who would notice? Who would care,
a few shepherds?

But the savior, the Messiah is born.

This is a miracle that still remains today. The turmoil of the world we live in fades behind the picture we paint of this baby's birth

Mary looking with adoring eyes on her newborn son,
Joseph looking on with wonder and awe,
angels in the sky calling the shepherds to come,
lighting that is just right to give us the assurance of the presence of the divine.

This is the story we still paint, the story we still tell, the story we will sing,

What child is this who laid to rest on Mary's lap is
sleeping

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus
lay down his sweet head

Infant holy, infant lowly; for his bed a cattle stall

"O little town of Bethlehem...the hopes and fears of all
the years are met in thee tonight."

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all
the earth.

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from your holy face,

To you this night the savior is born!

From my family to you and yours, Merry Christmas!

Amen

