

# **Twas the night before Christmas and what was God thinking?**

Gigi and I attended the Christmas Eve service this morning, had lunch, and checked our list (one more time) to make sure I did not need to join the hoards of last-minute shoppers. Thankful I did not, my mind turned to hear what the Holy Spirit would breathe into mine regarding "just another Christmas Eve". All I knew was I really wanted to share a brief word of encouragement on this joyous eve of expectancy – for little children who cannot wait to see what Santa brings and Christians who manage to clear our heads of all the "Christmas clutter" and remember why we do this in the first place.

Expectancy. When I saw this picture of Mary kneeling beside the manger and holding her soon-to-be-born baby in her arms, as only an expectant mom can do, I knew this was the image that would best accompany these words of reminder to all who will celebrate the birth of Christ our Savior tomorrow.

Twas the night before Christmas, and there sat Mary (with Joseph not far away). We know, nine months earlier, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and shared the most amazing words ever. She was about to become pregnant and carry in her womb the Son of God Who would become the Savior of the World. You may also recall Joseph was told that "his son" would "save His people from their sins". Both wondered what God was thinking?

Mary's life was further disrupted and pregnancy made even more uncomfortable – if not dangerous – when Joseph told her they had to journey to Bethlehem for a census since he was of the line of David that originated in this small town outside Jerusalem.

As an expectant dad, I know from watching Gigi endure four full-term pregnancies what those last few weeks can be like for a woman. While she could not wait for the baby to be born, there was a lot of discomfort that leads up to the most uncomfortable part of all – labor and delivery.

We have no idea what Mary and Joseph thought after those “God invasions” into their lives, as no thoughts or words are shared. What we see are incredible demonstrations of faith and obedience that cause me to shrink back in amazement. Did Mary really think, as this picture presents, she would be giving birth to the Son of God in a nasty stable surrounded by animals and the fragrant aroma of ox poop?

Yet we see her kneeling faithfully beside a feed trough (where animals slobbered all over it as they ate) rubbing and comforting her son in her womb, awaiting His arrival. Surely she must have wondered if this was really what God intended or was it just because the inn was full when they arrived.

No sterile surroundings of a birthing room. No nurses or midwives standing by waiting to help. Just poor old Joseph, perhaps just as clueless as the rest of us men who stood around awaiting the birth of our first child. I am sure he did what he could, perhaps laid out “fresh” hay and kept animals at bay while they waited for the arrival of the King Who would be their’s to raise.

One final “image of expectancy”. It could not be shown here because it exists only in the hearts and minds of Christ-lovers who pause long enough to consider the expectancy in Heaven as all angels, cherubim, seraphim, and every living creatures await the incarnation of the One they know already as King of Kings and Lord of all. Surely they were amazed that God would condescend to sinful, created beings such as humans to save and redeem us from our deliberate decisions of defiance and disobedience.

As I wrap this up, there are about six hours left before the day calendar gets flipped and “just another Christmas day” arrives. I hope you receive this message in time to enjoy, with child-like excitement and expectancy, the imminent arrival of our Savior.

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” She will bear a Son; and **you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**” Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” (Matthew 1: 18-23 NASB)*

Expectantly waiting with you,

*Walter*