

Luke 2:8-20  
Shepherds Night Out  
WRCoB 12.24.22

Nativity Scenes

Have become a Christmas tradition  
Since St Francis of Assisi in 1223 AD.

Like this one on our Altar table.

I love them!

Bob Phillips posted on FB  
A beautiful creche they purchased in France.

And when I visited Vi the other week  
She told me she collects them.

And so, I got this crazy idea for next year.

Wouldn't it be neat to have a display of Nativity Scenes  
Here at wrcoB, somehow, somewhere?

Many years ago, we spent Christmas in Montreal.

In the big cathedral in the heart of the city  
In the Museum of Oratory of St. Joseph  
They have a tradition of exhibiting crèches  
From all over the world.

They have a collection of 700 crèches.

This year they will display 100 of them  
From as many different countries.

Very interesting!

Because, of course, all of them are so different.

Each depicts their cultural and ethnic perspective.

You might see a Scandinavian crèche  
With a fair-skinned Jesus laid in animal furs.

Or you might see a dark-skinned African Jesus  
Under a grass-thatched, mud-walled stable.

The medium changes too depending on the country  
From wooden hand-carved characters  
To elaborate polished porcelain.

Setting up and spending time with a Crèche  
Etches in hearts and souls  
The image of that Christmas so long ago.

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The nativity scenes not only include the main characters  
Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph

But also a few animals scattered about  
A cow, a calf, certainly sheep and a donkey.

There are the shepherds in their rougher attire  
And the angels in their angelic wardrobe.

The three Magi are there all dressed up fancy-like  
With their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Everyone who had anything to do with that night was there  
Including additional characters

Bob Phillips' creche had all kinds of people  
Present at the scene in Bethlehem.

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Because of my interest in farming  
I like the shepherds' presence.

They play an important role in our Nativity Scenes.

You got to have the shepherds there.

For not only did shepherds play an important role  
In the Nativity  
They play an important role in the Bible.

Sheep were essential in Palestinian culture.

Sheep provided food to eat  
Milk to drink  
Wool to wear  
And skins for crafting all kinds of things.

According to the Bible  
Sheep were the first domesticated animal.

Cain's brother, Abel, kept sheep.

Many of the great characters in the Bible were shepherds.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, all raised sheep

Moses tended the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law  
When he ran into the burning bush.

King David was tending his father, Jesse's flock  
When Samuel anointed him king.

The prophet Amos also kept sheep.

And the story of the Nativity wouldn't be complete  
Without the shepherds' ruckus behavior.

After hearing the announcement from the angel, Gabriel  
With the heavenly host singing it up

The shepherds left their sheep  
And ran all the way to Bethlehem.

There, just as the angel said  
They found Mary and Joseph  
With baby Jesus in a manger.

They were hushed with wonder at the scene  
But they left in wild jubilation.

They danced their way through the streets of Bethlehem

Making quite the rumpus for such a late night.

For all we know, it could have been 3 in the morning

They, no doubt, made spectacles of themselves  
Running through the streets of town  
Glorifying and praising God.

Imagine what the townspeople thought?

The text says they were amazed.

Amazed? How?

Maybe they were amazed with annoyance  
That the shepherds were out this late  
Raising such a fuss at that hour.

They slammed open their shutters and shouted out  
At the foolishness of the shepherds and declared

“Been too long at the inn, if you ask me  
And who’s tending the sheep?”

Well, it didn’t really matter to the shepherds  
What the townsfolk thought.

They knew they weren’t drunk.

Giddy? Yes. Drunk? No!

It was truly a shepherds’ night out.  
One they’d not soon forget.

Getting back to our Nativity Scenes  
Not only do most churches  
Display a Nativity Scene  
Somewhere among their decorations

Many do a “Live Nativity”.

In a previous congregation I served  
They’ve had had a live nativity for over 25 years.

It was a lot of fun  
It was a lot of work.

Since it was a farming community  
They used live farm animals  
Including a miniature donkey and a llama.

Though, I don’t think llamas are indigenous to Palestine.

The whole church, young and old, got excited about it  
And everyone who wanted to be in it, got included  
From babies to grandmas!

Seriously, we had a 90-year-old grandma  
As an angel one year.

Dear, dear Betty!

It took the whole church to pull it off.

The shelter had to be erected  
The animals collected, costumes brought out.

Someone cooked a meal for the cast

There's cookies and fudge and hot chocolate to prepare.

You see, the visiting folks

Were invited to come in and warm up.

If you are part of the cast

You need to stand quietly for 10 minutes.

They use to change characters every ten minutes

Due to the Iowa winter.

The characters have to stand very still.

We hoped the animals behaved themselves too!

The congregation, a predominately-white one

Had a nice relationship with a black congregation

We shared in many different events through the years.

We invited them to join us one year for our Live Nativity.

One of the women from the other congregation

Didn't know what to think about the whole thing.

But she came, mostly out of curiosity, I think.

A middle-aged single mother

Who had recently joined the church.

When she got there  
She asked what she should do.

I told her, why not be a part of the cast?

We needed an angel. How about it?

She gave me that look  
As if to say, “Who? What? Me? No way!”

After convincing her she’d be great as an angel  
She got herself dressed and prepared.

We divided the people up between first and second shift  
An equal representation of both churches in each.

She was in the first shift.

Before we went out from the basement, we prayed.

I prayed that everyone who came to the Live Nativity  
Might sense something of the Sacred.

That we were, in a sense, evangelists  
Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

I also prayed that those of us  
Who participated in the Live Nativity

Might not only be a blessing but be blessed by it.

And then, we went out to face the cold.



And there she was, my African/American friend  
    Standing in the back on a bale of hay  
        Her arms raised in adoration to Baby Jesus  
            Tears streaming down her face.

She sensed something of the Sacred.

Upon seeing her emotion, we all sensed the Christmas Spirit

After the ten-minute shift was over  
    And we were back downstairs warming up  
        We all went and gave her a big hug.

She was ever so radiant.

She WAS a God-sent angel among us  
    And in her, we sensed Immanuel, God-with-us.

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Down through the years  
    Every Christmas, we adults  
        Like little children, get out our crèches.

We carefully take them out of their wrappings  
    Wipe the dust off them  
        And carefully set them up in a prominent place  
            On display for the world to see.

A small way to express our gratitude  
    For God's great gift of Jesus Christ.

Just maybe, following the very first Christmas  
Those shepherds continued to celebrate Christ's birthday  
Every year after that.

Maybe they recreated the night they witnessed the miracle.

Maybe they run through the streets of Bethlehem  
Hollering and carrying on  
Waking all the townspeople.  
Like they did on that first occasion.

Maybe it's become known as the annual  
"Shepherds' Night Out."

That would be awesome!

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I wish I was there that night long ago.

Our creches help us to imagine.

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May God grant you the light in Christmas which is faith  
The warmth of Christmas, which is love

The radiance of Christmas, which is purity  
The righteousness of Christmas, which is justice

The belief in Christmas, which is truth;

The all of Christmas, which is Christ.