

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 Creche
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 awaesome!

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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.