

Christian Perspectives

Some of us in the Headwaters Area have recently had to face the reality of winter weather without the usual comforts provided by electricity. Many have had to bundle up in blankets, sitting in the dark for several very cold evenings through Christmas week 2013. Some might portray this as a romantic adventure but more accurately it has been an unexpected hardship to simply get through. Plans for family gatherings have had to be altered. In some instances a lot of food has gone to waste. It will be a Christmas to remember for all the wrong reasons.

Perhaps it is a mechanism to avoid the mundane or the things we find hard to face. Perhaps it is merely a function of our God-given imaginations. Whatever the source, human beings can manage to manufacture a sense of romance where none may have ever been intended. Take the story of the birth of Jesus. The picture in our heads is that of a beautiful and peaceful tableau of mother and child, shepherds and angels, and stable beasts all tucked carefully into a miniature shed. Jesus' birth was actually set against the back drop of two very human realities ? weather and politics.

In the story of the birth of Jesus as told in the Gospel of Luke, the people of the nation of Israel were living in a country conquered by the Romans. This was a political reality. The Governor Quirinius decided to take a census of the people. He did not have his agents go door to door. Rather he demanded every head of a household take his family back to the town of his clan. Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem. They could find no place to spend the night due to the demand placed on the local inns by such mass migration. In desperation, because Mary had gone into labour, they sought refuge in a stable. As we represent this birth by placing figurines of Royal Doulton quality into a mock up of a pristine cow shed are we able to get past the romance and face the reality of the situation? A stable may have provided some shelter from the wind but certainly would not have been warm. Nor would it have been very clean. The stalls of large animals require mucking out on a regular basis. And any woman who has ever been through childbirth could tell you what it might be like to deliver a baby in a stable, on a bed of straw, without medical aid, during winter weather.

This December in Israel and other parts of the Middle East has been particularly harsh. Temperatures have frequently dipped below freezing and the snow fall has broken records in some areas. The country of Syria has been torn apart by political unrest and governmental retribution. Does this reality also move us beyond a romantic picture of the peaceful town of Bethlehem lightly robed in snow and illuminated by an extra large star? Does it move us to consider the lives of thousands and thousands of displaced persons living in the refugee camps in the Middle East? Among them are women who like Mary are giving birth under adverse circumstances. Some are infants like Jesus subject to cold and hardship. Have the December days some of us spent without electrical power helped us to recognize the harshness of life without the basic necessities?

Jesus was introduced very early on to the realities of political demands and harsh winter weather. He came to know life as it is and that moved him to spend his life bringing healing and hope to others. As we come to understand Jesus' human life and not confuse it with a romantic tableau of the birth scene, we too are called to see the realities of life and bring healing and hope where we can.

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