

“Among Us” - Christmas Eve, 2008

Ahhhhh, finally, Christmas Eve is here. Whew! After all the busy-ness, after all the exhausting preparations, this is the night. The stockings are hung, the decorations are up, the lights are twinkling, the pantry is groaning with food ready to be eaten, the presents are piled under the tree. It is a beautiful night, especially so with the heavy accumulation of pure white snow everywhere, for this is the night we celebrate our dear Saviour's birth. It is the night we reflect back to that most special of nights, when a long time ago, in a distant land occupied by a foreign army, God touched the earth, and the lives of people forever.

We love the story, and we can probably recite most of it from heart. We could say that we recite it from memory, but that seems too cerebral, a bit too cold and aloof and remote. This is a story that we recite from the heart, for it is a story of love, of heavenly love that covers all of creation.

It is a tender and intimate story, isn't it? In a few words we have the complete picture of a young couple becoming parents far from their home. In a moment, fear and uncertainty changed to joy and rejoicing, as a child is born, and is lovingly touched, wrapped in warm dry cloths and laid in a soft bed of sweet-smelling hay. (When we in the city hear about a stable, we tend to think of an uncomfortable place, full of animals and corresponding yukky animal smells, but those of us who have been blessed with the experience of coming into a warm barn on a cold and snowy night can still smell the sweet, sweet smell of hay.) A young woman gives birth, and their lives are touched forever.

And while it was a perfectly normal, quite unremarkable birth, it was at the same time a birth unlike any other. A birth so different from any other that even heaven couldn't keep quiet about it. An angel of the Lord found some poor shepherds hanging out on a hillside, and just had to blurt out the good news about this special birth. An ordinary birth in so many ways - and yet a birth so very unique that even the glory of the Lord lit up that hillside as the angel told these poor shepherds just how special this baby was, a Saviour, the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord. And with that pronouncement of a unique and incredible action of grace by God all heaven let loose with celebration - a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.

What was it about this birth that made it so unique that it would be accompanied by such heavenly acclaim? This was the moment foretold in scriptures, the moment when God was suddenly among people - among us - in a whole new and utterly meaningful way. This was the moment of "Immanuel - God with us" experiencing life as we do in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed One. No longer could people complain that God was somehow remote, stand-offish, unable or unwilling to truly feel peoples' pain, because now in the person who would be recognized as one with the Father and in whom the Father could be found God was - and continues to be - fully among us.

And so we this night, recognizing God among us, join the long series of people across the ages and we come to witness, we come to pay our respects at the feet of the Holy Child who came that we might have life, abundant and eternal. The Holy Child, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Son of the Most High, Jesus, our Lord and our King. As we come before Him, once again hear the story, let it wash over you, embrace it in your hearts, embrace that young couple, and above all embrace the Holy Child in your hearts as well, preparing Him room, and experiencing in Him the presence of God near you, the touch of God healing you, restoring you, uplifting you, until at last we all shall be touched and embraced in His loving arms for all time.