

THE DIFFERENCE HIS PRESENCE MAKES
-SOME INCARNATION STORIES-

The Comforter is here -- from a ten year old

"When I am scared at night or when I am anxious or depressed, it comforts me to know He is with me."

The incomprehensible One is with us

"I don't really have a stunning story, but the whole thing has always baffled me. I can't understand a love that keeps trying and pursuing after so much rejection and disappointment. I know that's not what I do. If I were God, and a good thing I'm not, I would have scrapped the whole world after the Garden of Eden."

The Lover of our souls is with us

"I get frustrated with my own bad habits and apathy and selfishness and sin—I used to call myself a Disappointment with a capital D. I really couldn't understand what He wanted with me anyway. Then, because He is still Immanuel, God with us, he spoke to my heart, "You're not a disappointment to Me." No matter how much I screw up, He still loves and pursues me with the kind of love that goes to earth and to the grave and back. So I keep at my faith. I try to love others and forgive. And I say thank you to Him whenever I remember."

The Peacemaker is here" -- from a six year old

"When I get mad at my brother, Jesus helps me to calm down and be kind to him."

Unafraid! Of living or dying with Him with us

The third 'stunning story' in Carl's email reminded me again....when you are told you are going to die, it, also, makes you unafraid of living. In fact, when you live in spite of the prediction, it makes you unafraid of living or dying for all the years you have been given.

Wha-boom Jesus is born – from "The Story of Joseph" by a teenager

"We had to journey across the sandy plains. The journey was a little longer than I thought it would be. Mary was hanging in there. Luckily, we made it to Bethlehem before Mary had the baby.

When we arrived at Bethlehem, I had to ask if there was any room

whatsoever. The owner of the inn told us that he would lend us his stable since all the other rooms in the inn were taken. The stable smelled and sounded like a bunch of mooing cows.

Wha-boom! That's when Mary gave birth to Jesus, right then and there. We laid him in a manger. It was just wonderful. As I looked into the face of that tiny baby, I thought that everything would be A-okay. I had nothing to fear. Mary was feeling okay."

Living in His presence

Having the faith to believe the Gospel for ourselves and for others EQUALLY is a sign of maturity, leading to humility and vulnerable relationships in community, and a willingness to simply serve Christ wherever we find ourselves each day (i.e., not our agenda, but his) - to pray to be drawn nearer to him, and to love what he loves and to be what he would be in each situation and relationship.

Showing His love in His presence – from a parishioner's journal

A parishioner underwent heart surgery and has suffered many complications and setbacks. I saw our parishioners, Home groups, and church rally around him and his wife and all manner of support including financial, Prayer and friendship.

A parishioner attended a first Friday closer. She was experiencing chest pain prior to going but felt drawn to go. During prayer, worship songs, and discussions the pain subsided and she was giggling before the end of the evening.

Really Hearing the Words for the First Time

I was brought up in the Lutheran Church. We were regular attenders but the gospel never really registered until a Young Life group came to my high school. At a weekend retreat, I accepted Christ as my Savior. I attended Luther League until college, but quickly put God on the back burner when I was on my own. I basically said to Him, "See you later, I want to have fun." Left to my own agenda, I wander in the wilderness UNTIL one Christmas Eve Service at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Maitland. The Spirit hit me like lightning and I actually HEARD the words that we were singing, not just the words but their meaning. These were songs I had sung every Christmas throughout my entire life, but at that moment something magical was happening to me. I started crying, then bawling, then sobbing. People around me were turning around to see what was going on. Then priest came down from his place at the altar and put his hand on my shoulder and with real compassion asked if I was alright.

I blubbered, "The words, the words, I understand them now." He was most kind despite the fact that I had been causing a scene. I tried to pull myself together, but I have to admit, I have not been the same since.

Look at baby Jesus. He is just like us!

Every Advent, our church in Pittsburgh held an outreach for the children and families in the area to explain the real meaning of Christmas. Up to 7,000 children and adults came each year during the four days called "The Joy of Sharing Christmas." The story unfolded as tour guides led groups of 35 through a series of rooms where live actors would interact with the children. In costume with appropriate staging, actors would tell the REAL Christmas story. In the first room, Gabriel appeared to Mary. Next room the angels appeared to the shepherds. This was followed by the stable room with Joseph, Mary and a live baby portraying Jesus. Further on, three wise men showed the gifts they brought for baby Jesus. A full size camel was tethered outside their tent.

One year, a member who worked with children in the inner city of Pittsburgh asked if we could have a special presentation Saturday morning. She wanted to bring a bus load of African American children through the tour before the regular tours began that day. As I thought about it, I was concerned that all of our actors were white. This could be a significant barrier to these children in getting the message that Jesus belonged to them as well. I asked our member if she could find a young black couple with baby to learn the script, so they could play the part of the Holy Family. Oh, and also find at least one black shepherd and one wise man to work with our regular white actors.

She was successful. After quick rehearsals with our various room coordinators, some 70 children arrived by bus and began the tour. I followed the first group as they entered the stable in Bethlehem, and knelt in silent awe before the black Joseph, Mary and wiggly baby Jesus. Joseph and Mary began to tell the children what it was like that first Christmas night. In the back row, one of the children turned to his buddy and whispered, "Look at baby Jesus. He looks just like us!" I knew we had it right. Jesus did not come just for white folk. He came to be the Savior of the world. And as Joseph and Mary led the children in quietly singing "Silent Night" to baby Jesus, at least these African American children were able to "see" that He belonged to them!

That very moment, I thanked the Lord that we were blessed being a blessing!