

Greetings dear people of the manager and of the hill called Mount Calvary,

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 1:20-23 (MSG) – Larger reading: Matthew 1:18-25

“While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God’s angel spoke in the dream: “Joseph, son of David, don’t hesitate to get married. Mary’s pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God’s Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—‘God saves’—because he will save his people from their sins.” This would bring the prophet’s embryonic sermon to full term: Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”).”

STORY: by Paul Harvey ... *A Modern Parable* - As read on the radio

Unable to trace its proper parentage, I have designated this as my Christmas story of "The Man and the Birds." You know the Christmas story, the God born a man in a manger, and all that escapes some moderns — mostly, I think, because they seek complex answers to their questions, and this one's so utterly simple. So for the cynics and the skeptics and the unconvinced, I submit a modern parable:

Now, the man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a Scrooge; he was a kind, descent, mostly good man, generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmastime. It just didn't make sense, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus story about God coming to earth as a man.

"I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite, that he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed, and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier, and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound, then another, and then another, sort of a thump or a thud. At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window; but when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm, and in a desperate search for shelter had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in, so he hurried back to the house, fetched breadcrumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted, wide-opened doorway of the stable. But to his dismay the birds ignored the breadcrumbs and continued to flop around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them; he tried

shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms. Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.

And then he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me, that I'm not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow; they would not be led or shooed, because they feared him.

If only I could be a bird, he thought to himself, and mingle with them and speak their language! Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to the safe, warm . . . to the safe warm barn . . . but I would have to be one of them, so they could see and hear and understand. At that moment, the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sound of the wind, and he stood there listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. . . . And he sank to his knees in the snow.

REFLECTION:

So simple that it is kind of hard to grasp ... God coming to us in the form of a baby, but how else could he tell the humans how much he loves them? Simple? Profound? Yes and yes!

What will it take for each of us to fully reason this truth? Some birds caught in a winter storm? How can God break into your thinking ... into your soul ... into your spirit? When that happens then there you'll find the Christmas miracle!

QUOTE:

“The nativity mystery “conceived from the Holy Spirit and born from the Virgin Mary”, means, that God became human, truly human out of his own grace. The miracle of the existence of Jesus , his “climbing down of God” is: Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary! Here is a human being, the Virgin Mary, and as he comes from God, Jesus comes also from this human being. Born of the Virgin Mary means a human origin for God. Jesus Christ is not only truly God, he is human like every one of us. He is human without limitation. He is not only similar to us, he is like us.” – Karl Barth

PRAYER:

I'm praying, Lord, for a Christmas miracle. I'm praying that the truth and reality of the Emmanuel, God with us, will become so real this year that my life with truly and completely transformed into what you have created in me. Come, Lord Jesus ... come into me like never before and I earnestly pray this in his precious name. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
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***Worship TODAY: In-person in the sanctuary at 10:30
OR via FaceBook (Manatee United Methodist Church) – posted by 1:00***

***OR via YouTube by Monday morning
(Adrienne will send you the link).***