

Faith Formation Adapting Christmas

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

A PERSONAL CHRISTMAS

- ARTISTS
- STORYTELLERS
- PAGEANTS
- MUSIC
- PRAYERS



Just about every artist has done it. Most parents have done it. Even pastors and preachers have done it. That’s adapting the Christmas story to the audience. Now don’t get me wrong, I don’t believe that Santa Claus appeared at the manger nor do I believe that the little drummer boy was there either. But I really don’t fault (too much) those who have added these characters. For it is very much in the Ignatian tradition of prayer and contemplation to add characters to such a scene and through their interactions help us to

understand and to experience such an event.

That doesn’t mean we’ve been given carte blanche in the matter. There is a certain integrity to the story that must be maintained. Jesus was not born in the Ritz Carlton. Nor did he have an Izod onesie to wear. But what would be integral to the story?

I believe we would all agree the family would have been of modest if not meager means. They would have been displaced from home, unable to find adequate accommodations. While the event of the birth itself is not miraculous, there is something in the occasion that is recognized by the people as “full of grace” and “hope filled.” That the people, whether the peasant shepherds or the noble wise men, somehow believed that the spirit of God touched the earth and that they were witnesses to it.

So it doesn’t much matter whether the birth took place in a barn, a lean-to, a

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Emmanuel – God with us

What does it take for you to believe that God is with us? Let’s face it, some of it is our upbringing and our experience. Our sense of the sacred goes way back, to those empty

silences or full throated choirs we encountered in church to the grandeur of nature or the quiet nook in the woods. What we call holy is very much imbued with our own experiences of the holy—whether that

be God, God’s creatures, God’s creation or God’s children. So it isn’t any wonder that we should find our season of Christmas to be laced with our culture, our heritage

A Personal Christmas (cont)



cave or a sheltered corral, what matters most is that this couple endured what was necessary to bring their son into the world, just as they promised God they would. So it doesn't matter whether the cultural items that surround the scene are true to the era or true to our own culture and time. What matters is the center of it all, the babe in the crib, the doting parents, the struggle but the hope, the faith, the love that overcomes the adversity.

For myself, I often imagined the individuals, Mary and Joseph, as immigrants in the south where I lived for many years. I can imagine Joseph as a carpenter, working for a city like Mobile, not earning a whole lot, but getting by. And as is often the case, this couple, like so many others, is displaced by a hurricane. But the poor

don't get to flee early. They were often the "essential workers" of today. Joseph may have been tasked with boarding up government offices or schools, until the very last minute. In this "modern" version, maybe not a mule to carry Mary and child but more an old but reliable pickup truck. Knowing there to be no room at the inns on the main highways, they flee along the secondary roads, the old two lane roads. Coming along to one of those simple cinderblock motels I think we've all seen, they are forced to stop because of Mary impending delivery.

Without a room available, the innkeeper offers up a shed or "garage" where the lawn equipment is kept. With muscle and determination, I can imagine Joseph making a habitable space, complete with a "crib" from crates and cardboard, a tarp against the wall to keep the wind at bay. An old kerosene lamp or even an electric one provides the lights.

Now the inn-keeper isn't totally cold hearted. He has put up a lot of folks at the place. And he knows that some of the poorest are often times the most self-sufficient. So he knocks on doors along the row to find someone who can help with the birth. An old midwife appears as well as many others offering lend a hand, to crowd in after the child is born, to offer this own little gifts of a coat, a sweater, a blanket and such to make life warm and cozy for mother and child. They themselves offer prayers of thanksgiving, words of praise for God's goodness in the midst of adversity, recognizing God's presence and God's blessing. They leave behind a legacy of humanity's goodness in the wake of what seems cruel fortune. And they sing till today of the wonder of that night.

If Hollywood asked, how would you tell the story? More importantly, if your children or grandchildren are to ask, how will you tell them the story? Will you add parts of the world that you have seen to make it something less abstract and closer to home? And what would those "homey" touches mean for you. Would you recognize the faces of those who came to help, to bear witness, to simply be with you? Who might they be? Who has taught you the story of Christmas, maybe not in word but in deed? Can you include them in your telling so that all may come to know, how close God is to God's people—now as in the days of old?



Emmanuel — God with Us (cont)

and our experiences. For some of us that is the iconic—the gold leaf, the halos, the odd perspective. For some of us that maybe the more simple, the rustic, the tangible.



But that should not hold you back from discovering anew the sense of sacred in other cultures, traditions or representations. Sometimes it takes a little plain old pondering. Sometimes it takes a bit of dialogue with someone to understand the meaning and the inspiration. Some complained when Pope Francis selected very different styles for the Nativity scene in St. Peter's Square. But many, when they

came to know, told a different story. <https://www.catholicnews.com/away-with-the-manger-nativity-scene-at-vatican-generates-controversy/> However personal we may feel about our version of the Nativity, it really should be a time for us to also step outside of ourselves to see with the eyes of others. When we do so, we get a little bit closer to God's view and hopefully a little bit closer to God's love for all his children. After all, isn't that the reason for the season?



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To Ponder and to Share

1. What do you consider important aspects about the Christmas story that you would want to pass onto others?
2. Where have you found the spirit of Christmas in places you didn't expect?
3. What decorations in your home have the most meaning for you? Have you told their story to others?
4. What sacred songs put you into the Christmas spirit? Have you played them lately or shared them with others?

St. Ignatius Loyola Church
2309 Gaylord St
Denver, CO 80205

Phone: 303-322-8042
Fax: 303-322-2927

Finding God in All Things

Listening to the Children

Unfortunately many of the children have been co-opted by the story of Santa Claus and often do not see the real meaning of Christmas. But there are some exceptions. One of the more notable are the Christmas pageants that happen in many towns and churches.

Yes, I went to Youtube and entered a search like "Children's Christmas Pageants" and found many different entries. Many were as amateur as you would expect, some tried to update the story, telling it from a newsdesk, others were combinations of virtual segments patched together. In all, many were not too helpful for putting me into what I would call a "holy" mood. Yet searching for the "star" is what the wise men did. Maybe you might want to follow their example and look for the "true" story, that place where the meaning of Christmas is revealed. I wish you all good hunting.