

The Vintage Voice

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Your Very Own Christmas Story

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Where shall we find eyes to see Christmas? How shall we turn our ears to hear its fresh notes? Perhaps the only way to see Christmas afresh is to see it in our own story.

Where is your manger, in which Christ is born in you? Your signs in the sky? Your men wise for their time? Your event like Caesar's census that could not have come at a worse time? Your Herod lurking somewhere, and feared? Your Joseph; yes, and your Mary, bearing the Christ to be born in you? Where is your innkeeper, who doesn't mean to be mean but is all business; and in fact there is no room, not with all the other things going on here? And where are your animal friends, to do your bidding and to share your beholding? Where is that hillside of hope in your life, where you really didn't expect anything to happen at all and glory broke loose?

They are all a part of the Christmas story, your story, Christ being born in you.

Some have happened; you can name them. Some are happening; enjoy them or suffer them. Both pain and joy are part of your Christmas story. And some are yet to happen, to be expected, each according to our own story. I just hope that I can describe them in a way that you can recognize them as the Christmas story of your life.

The Joseph and Mary of your Christmas story, the story of Christ being born in you, are not your parents; maybe, but not necessarily so. But almost always, there is a man and a woman in your life who, before you even knew it, so acted toward you and for you as to bring your new soul to birth. A man who simply did what needed to be done at a certain time and at a particular place in your life, that's your Joseph. Did you know him, that silent carpenter of your new birth? And your Mary, who was she? Some woman along your way who received you warm and tender, and looked at you with eyes that saw all that you were to be. Your Mary let you know that you were somebody, perhaps for the first time in your life. Maybe just saying your name, she made you like it, and know something of what it means. Your first Mary is special, but she has a way of turning up again and again in different persons, just to remind you that you are somebody.

Everybody has his or her Herods lurking somewhere. They often seem remote, yet the fear they press on us is very real. Herods are very hard to get at, and most of the time, we are not sure that we want to. Who wants to uncover the things of which they are really afraid? The kings of our fear have a way of continuing their reign; when one dies, another takes his place, until that day — and it is a big day — when we are willing to confront our Herod face to face and say, "You have no power over me." The Lord is the Lord of my life. And Herod is remembered only for the King who took his place.

The wise men of our story are not necessarily the smartest people who ever lived; no, not at all. Remember simply that procession of people who have entered your life and said the right thing at the right time. Perhaps they never knew that their passing remark reflected the wisdom of the ages in pointing to Christ being born in us. Somehow they let us know that what was going on in us was going on in all. Who are your wise men, wise for your time?

And you know, of course, that hillsides of hope where glory breaks through do not have to be hillsides at all. They can be riversides or oceansides, forest glens or pastures; somewhere large and surrounding, where we feel very small. Sometimes, then, our angels sing. And we are called to go and look for something, something that we had not expected but somehow knew was promised.

I suppose that of all the elements of the Christmas story, my favorite is the animals, not mentioned by Matthew and Luke at all. We add them, feeling that they must be there. The friendly animals are those who are present, and we are glad they are, but they really do not comprehend what's happening at all. And they don't need to understand all about the birth of Christ in us, for none of us does. But remember the animals of your story, whether human or the four-footed kind.

When we come together to celebrate at Christmas, we are most like the gathered friendly animals, each to each other a friend. We don't understand it all, but we know something is happening. We share in faith and joy the birth of Christ in each of us. We watch, we listen, we nuzzle to get a little closer. We make our own funny noises. You have to listen very carefully to understand what we are really saying. You have to look past the stubborn donkey in us, the cantankerous camel, the couldn't-care-less cow, the prim and shining rooster, the fluffed-up and bleating sheep, to catch the glint in each eye that reflects the birth of Christ we all share.

For each of us, at some time and some place, there is a Mary and a Joseph, a Herod lurking and an innkeeper busy, some men wise for our time, a hillside of hope where glory breaks, and, thank God, a manger.

As you hear of Christ's story being born in us, tell him your story as you are born in him. He likes that. That's really what Christmas is — thanking God that his story has become our story.



Bert Newton has published verse and a number of articles and essays, including this meditation published in *Biblical Interleaves in Prose and Verse* by *Forward Movement Publications*, Cincinnati, 1987. After retiring in 1995, Bert and his wife, Jean, moved to Spanish Fort, Alabama, in 1999. They enjoy living independently in Westminster Village, a Life-Care Retirement Community. Bert continues to do supply work at their parish home, St. Paul's in Daphne, Alabama, as well as other nearby churches. They have four children, who live all over the Southeast, and seven grandchildren.



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