

Luke 2:1-20

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse... remember the old story of Santa breaking through the stillness to bring gifts to a sleeping household and making so much noise that the man of the house awoke and watched him throughout the entire process? Well, it's the night before Christmas. We're in church, and it's not that quiet. We're singing, praying, listening to great music being played, and the Word of God being proclaimed.

As much as we would like to believe it was a silent night in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, it wasn't. They were in the middle of an active, good sized town, that was swollen to a bursting point because of all the people who had returned to register. Who knows why they were required to return to their family's city of origin to register, but that was the decree of the governor. Although there was no traffic noise as we know it, there was the sound of people gathering and celebrating, there were the noises of the animals... cows, sheep, donkeys, goats, and who knows most likely there were hens and roosters. Roosters can be very noisy. I have a friend with chickens and, believe it or not, roosters don't crow only at the break of dawn, they crow whenever they want to, sometimes in the middle of the night if they are disturbed. And I would imagine they would have been disturbed on a regular basis that night so long ago.

Think about it... the owner of the stable where Mary and Joseph were spending the night most likely would have checked to make sure they were settled, and maybe his wife would have been there to assist Mary with childbirth, at least I hope there was some other woman to assist her, perhaps the town's midwife. Normally babies cry when they are born, and when they are hungry. A silent night? I don't think so.

Then there's the shepherds experience. It's dark, all the sheep they tend are safely in their sheepfold. It seems like a normal night as they settle down to get ready for sleep when all of a sudden what should appear? An angel of the Lord standing before them. It seems as though angels must startle people when they appear because most often the first words we hear from an angel is "Do not be afraid." The angel proclaimed his message, "I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Then a multitude of the heavenly hosts, what we understand to be a choir of angels, bursts out in song, singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" There is no quiet night for these shepherds as they decide to travel into town to see if they can find this newborn king. So, after Mary, Joseph and Jesus had settled in the shepherds came to pay them a visit. Although they may have been in awe, I cannot imagine the shepherds being quiet. And we know when they left, they spread the good news throughout the town to everyone they saw. A silent night? I don't think so.

But isn't the idea of a silent night a beautiful thought? I don't know about you, but I like to find times of quiet when I can relax and reflect. There's nothing I enjoy more about the Christmas season than sitting in my chair at the end of the day with only the Christmas tree, and maybe a candle, lit and thinking about whatever comes to mind.... The Bible tells us Mary pondered all of the events of her special night in her heart.

I love the Christmas song, "Mary did you Know?" written by Mark Lowry.... He asks Mary if she knew all that Jesus would accomplish during his time on earth. The answer is, yes, Mary knew, maybe not the details, but Mary knew her son was more than a mere mortal. She knew

he was, as she sang in her Magnificat, the one who would scatter the proud in their conceit, cast the mighty from their thrones, and lift up the lowly; he would be the one who would fill the hungry with good things.

Jesus was born into this world as God's son, sent to reacquaint God's people with God, and to allow God to better understand his creation. This all happened because God so loved the world. God so loved the world that he did not make us seek out our own salvation. No matter who we are, no matter what hurt, injury, pain, or even joy we carry, we do not have to earn God's love. God does not require that we build up our own strength to meet God's expectations, God becomes our strength.

Jesus was also born to defeat death. He became human and learned what it is like to have sorrow, anger, loneliness, and longing. And as he hung on the cross all these were transformed into incomprehensible joy through his death and resurrection. With his ascension the Holy Spirit came to live with humankind. Comforter is another name for the Holy Spirit, and in Ukrainian the root of the word comforter is joy. A different kind of joy than what the world knows, a joy that no matter what happens we have the presence of God in our lives. God will not leave nor desert us. God wants to be in a close relationship with us. God has an inexhaustible supply of love, enough for everyone, and then some. Jesus came to bring hope, peace, joy, and love to the world, all we have to do is receive him. In Christ God becomes present and accessible to all people.

God comes to each of us in different ways. Sometimes it is through the word of God being proclaimed by a preacher. Sometimes it is by observing the quiet unassuming ways of a Christian friend. Sometimes it is the quiet conviction of the Holy Spirit which turns us away from the wrong path and brings us to confession and new life in Christ. Whatever way God arrives, we are not to stay in quiet seclusion. God's message is to be proclaimed by our lives. It is not a silent night.

All glory be to God.