



Christmas Eve – Fog

On January 1st, 2003, I embarked on a journey, more a pilgrimage of sorts, from San Bernardino, CA to Pasadena. I was living in California and had always wanted to see the Tournament of Roses parade. My friend, Sergio, and I left around 3:00 a.m. to get parked and find a place along the route. It happened to be a very foggy morning. As a Midwesterner, I was used to fog. Sergio was not.

Even more than the beauty of the parade, I remember Sergio grabbing the dash and screaming something about me being a little crazy. He had never traveled in fog before. In fact, I am not sure any of the other drivers ever had. All the cars we saw were pulled over on the side of the road. For me, that meant I could move to the left lane and had another 4 lanes between myself and the other cars that were pulled over or traveling slowly. For him, I may as well have been driving blindfolded.

As the Gospel writer wrote of Jesus birth, he took great care to set the story within the sociopolitical context of the day. We are told who the leaders were, from the emperor to the local officials. It is set in the time of Herod, which was an exceptionally dark time for the Judeans. Rome ruled with a fist, and Herod took what was left. The story is even cast during a census. This is not just to count how many people there are around in each town. These censuses were taken so that the government could tax even more. Those who have little would soon have even less.

Mary and Joseph travel while nearing the birth of their child. They are away from home and will be for quite some time. They are not the only ones struggling in this text. The shepherds are trying to manage their flocks, all while others are traveling for a census. The shepherds don't even count. Not to Rome. Not to those living close by. Not to those traveling through. I imagine they felt even more oppressed than those who could rely on the support of extended family.

This is setting when the array of heavenly host breaks in with good news of great joy. Things looked hopeless. Joy burst in. This joy is so overwhelming that the shepherds embark on a journey, rather a pilgrimage, of their own. They travel in to Bethlehem to see this child who was born that night. In the cover of the night sky, they journey to see this sign, a newborn wrapped in bands of cloth in a manger.

Their story does not continue through the Gospel of St. Luke. These shepherds are the first humans to share the good news of great joy. Then, they exit the story just as fast. I sometimes wonder what their life was like after that. There is the sense of joy and hope that breaks in through the night sky. They gain this tangible sense that God is at work, and that they are included. How was their life different after that? Did anyone else believe them? Did they keep that sense of hope until Jesus' ministry began? We are never told. What we are told is that the good news they receive is good news for all, even those who are on the outskirts of society. We also hear that joy and love are louder than fear.

That trip through the fog seemed scary for Sergio. And, as much as that humored me at the time, I get it. It can be scary when we cannot see things as clearly as we would like. In a dense fog, you may only be able to see a few blocks. It can feel scary. We even get alerts on our phones to tell us it is foggy and to be careful. Yet do you know how much water it takes to create a dense fog over 7 city blocks, 100 ft. tall? That water would fit in one 8 oz. glass. That is all that it is. Yet that glass of water can make us change plans and become fear filled.

The noise and fears of this world can seem scary. They can seem overwhelming. It can feel like we are in a dense fog. Don't let fear win. Joy and hope are stronger than fear. There is good news of great joy. God is with us, and nothing can ever change that. Find peace in this good news. Let joy burst in. God is with us. Amen.

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