

## **Christmas Letter From Patrick 2021**

As I was standing in a long line at the grocery store I got to thinking about the Christian Christmas story. In the past I have mentioned how I find this story both fantastic and at the same time so unlikely. I don't doubt that God would want to become human and walk among us. The God of all creation can do anything, and as our God loves us becoming one of us is a gift to accept and cherish.

But then the story for me becomes logically improbable. If God were to be born human, why would God choose a very young, unwedded couple for this purpose? It seems an unlikely choice for God. If God were to be born into the ancient Israelite culture, why choose Bethlehem as the birth place? Surely Jerusalem with its temple and its history would make more sense. These would appear to be odd choices on the part of God, but the improbable nature of the story just keeps piling on. Jesus was born not in a temple or a place of honour, but in a cold barn with a dirt floor in the middle of the night. Jesus was then wrapped in old swaddling clothes and placed in an animal food trough. If I did not know the Christian story these are not the conditions I would expect God would choose to enter humanity.

The extraordinary nature of this story is still not finished. I do believe that angels would announce God's entry into the world, and they did just that. But they do not come to the authorities or rulers of the region, nor do they come to the privileged and the powerful. Instead the angels come to some of the poorest and most marginalized people in the area – the shepherds watching their flocks by night. You might think the angels would first go to those whose word and testimony would be easily accepted, like the rich and the influential. Instead they choose the opposite end of the social ladder; those in extreme poverty and need.

Lastly Jesus gets visited by three wealthy wise men who give him expensive gifts. Well, I might think to myself, finally this part of the story makes sense. You would expect the Son of God to receive no less. But even this part of the story seems unlikely when you look at it closely. These three wise men are not named and come from some undisclosed region in the far east. Why are they so unknown, so inconspicuous? Surely the story would have been stronger if the rulers of nearby kingdoms had arrived.

Authorities from the Kingdom's of Egypt and Phoenicia and Assyria would have lent far more credibility and weight to the story.

So as I am standing in the checkout line I think to myself as unlikely as the Christmas story is, God obviously wanted it just this way. After all the star of Bethlehem was over Bethlehem and not Jerusalem or New York or London for that matter. What Message was God sending by sending Jesus to us in just this way? There are of course many ways you could look at it, but for me it is made most clear in the angelic announcement to the shepherds. Imagine knowing and feeling and living a life of impoverishment, and fear and hunger and prejudice and injustice. Then imagine a host of heavenly angels coming to you, to you specifically, and announcing the Son of God has been born **for you**. It would be inspiring. It would be fulfilling. It would be life changing. No king or queen, no millionaire or billionaire, no ruler or leader in the world had nor will ever have that experience.

In his ministry Jesus would say that he came especially for those who needed him. At Christmas we celebrate this unlikely story and believe that this miracle recreates itself every year. Jesus is once again coming to those who call for him, coming to those who need him. As I was waiting in the lineup, it was not lost on me that there are so many people this year who need to hear the angels sing of the coming of Jesus. So that is my very wish for all of you. May you and your loved ones be inspired and fulfilled and transformed by the Christmas story. May the peace, hope, joy and love of Christ be with you now and always. Many blessings to you all.

The Reverend Patrick Blaney