

Advent Devotional – Friday, December 21, 2018

A central part of our Christmas décor is a Nativity Scene, also known as a Manger Scene, also known as a Creche. These are scenes that depict the birth of Christ, and they can come in a variety of forms. We have several. We have a large picture that hangs on the wall, a manger scene built into a cross that hangs on another wall, a variety of nativity scene ornaments that hang on our trees, several table-top versions displayed in various places throughout our home, and even a nativity throw blanket.

One of our most precious nativity scenes is the one that my mother gave me. It was hers, and now it is a precious reminder of her. Last year, seven months after my mother passed on to glory, Jeff and I unpacked Mom's nativity scene for the first time. That's when we discovered something troublesome – Joseph was missing. The nativity scene tells the story of the birth of Christ. How can that story adequately be told without Joseph? He was Mary's fiancé. He was visited by the angel who convinced him to marry Mary despite her being pregnant, and not by him. It was Joseph who kept Mary from suffering the shame and punishment that would have awaited her as an unwed, pregnant girl. It was Joseph who came from the line of David. That was the reason they were in Bethlehem for the census. And it was Joseph, who had the right as the child's presumed father, who declared his name to be Jesus ("God saves").

What were we to do? We couldn't just discard the nativity scene; it was too precious to me. But we couldn't display it without Joseph. So, we packed it away until 2018 and set out on a quest to find a Joseph that would fit. Fast forward to December 7, 2018, two days before our Christmas Open House. We unpack the nativity scene and, oops, we had forgotten all about needing a new Joseph. We searched online and in stores – no luck. But we were running out of time, and we were not going to pack it away this year. So, we did the next best thing. We substituted one of the shepherds for Joseph. Now you know our secret. If you look closely at our nativity scene you will see that the part of Joseph is being played by Shepherd #2.

That got me to thinking. Isn't that so fitting to the Christmas story? God shows up in the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph in a very unusual way. He interrupts their normal routines and, with no advance notice, calls them to serve God in ways they certainly never planned and probably didn't believe they were equipped to do. And each one of them, in their own way, says yes. Their planned route through life goes away, and they step up to do whatever God needs, so that the story of God's love demonstrated through the gift of his Son could be told. That's what Shepherd #2 did at our house. And that's what each of us is called to do in the life God has given us.

How is God working in your life to continue his story through you?

One of the primary voices who foretold of the coming Christ child was the prophet Isaiah. He too was interrupted by God and asked to be part of the Story.

When he heard God say, "Whom shall I send?"
He responded with, "Here am I. Send me!"
(Isaiah 6:8 – NIV)

When you hear God's voice, as the prophet Isaiah did, saying: "Whom shall I send?" are you ready to say, as did Isaiah, Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Shepherd #2:

"Here am I. Send me!"

O Come, O Come Emmanuel – make us part of your story,
Pastor Jannette