

1 CHRISTMAS C

Auditions were held in heaven for the angel choir that would sing to the shepherds on the first Christmas. A committee selected only 100 angels, based on musical ability, commitment to practice, and overall enthusiasm for the task.

When the choir director met with the choir for the first time, one voice was obviously out of place; it was loud and off key. After listening to each angel individually, the angry director identified the loud angel and sent her home.

The selection committee intervened, stressing that the loud angel was deliberately included because her commitment and enthusiasm clearly exceeded that of all others who auditioned. The committee made its case up the chain of command and ultimately God called the choir director on the telephone to have the loud angel reinstated.

Months of rehearsal failed to train the loud angel to sing more quietly and on key. In volume and pitch, the loud angel was not able to blend with the other 99 voices. In desperation, the day before Christmas the choir director instructed the loud angel to move her lips, but not to let any sound pass through them.

With the loud angel silenced, the angel choir was perfect. The dress rehearsal was flawless, but no one, including the choir director, was satisfied. It just was not quite right, and everyone knew it. The unique sound of this choir – what made it special and gave it character – was missing; it lacked that one voice that was slightly louder and slightly off key.

With resignation, the choir director told the loud angel to sing, “but not too loud.”

All 100 angels and the choir director had tears in their eyes as they heard their signature sound restored with the return of the loud angel’s voice standing out among the rest.

On Christmas, the shepherds said that the angel choir was the very best they ever heard.

On this seventh day of the Christmas season we hear the proclamation that God sent the world the very best he had. And he sent his Son to dwell among those who thought him to be “off key.”

It's rather a simple way to talk about this first chapter of John's gospel, one that has been the source of some heavy duty thinking about what happened on Christmas Day.

The Gospel of John pulls out all stops on his theological masterpiece. They speak of a new birth: the new birth of a nation, the new birth that comes via adoption by God and how God set out to make first the very last part of his creation.

From the beginning of time when the universe came into being what was made continues to be renewed in the cycle of death and life. Jesus, the Word, creates all things according to his design and maintains all things. In John's gospel God goes beyond maintenance to personal participation in what he made. The Word bursts out of its bulging membrane because it can not and must not be contained. The Word is creative thought and energy and must by nature go out and make all things new. This includes humanity: God did not forget the human condition and turn his back and let us go like some battery-operated toy.

The Message, that modern paraphrase of the Bible says it plainly: "The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, in readiness for God from day one. Everything was created through him, nothing -- not one thing!-- came into being without him. What came into existence was life, and the Life was light to live by. The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness, the darkness couldn't put it out."

The God who was once distant admiring his creation now becomes the God who is near and fully present.

God came as a child that people might remember that He belongs to the human family. God subjects his Son to the human condition. To put it rather bluntly, Jesus, the Word, goes potty in the manger! The swaddling clothes have to be changed and Jesus cries and the laundry is waiting to be done! God subjects himself to every possible human frailty and frustration. He experiences the "poopiness" of life that we might know God surely is with us!

In verses 9-13 of John 1 The Message reads,

"The Life-Light was the real thing:

Every person entering Life he brings into Light. He was in the world,

the world was there through him,

and yet the world didn't even notice.

He came to his own people,

but they didn't want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves.
These are the God-begotten,
not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

God in Jesus comes in human packaging relentlessly seeking to make us true to our design, true to our selves. Like the angel who sang off key, God would not change the voice of the angel but would bring the angel into harmony with his choir. God could have started over and redesigned man for better behavior, yet decides to bring back his last day of creation from the depths of despair. God rescues man. God stoops to the lowest level and raises up humanity to the level of His Son.

Many years ago, I worked as a young operating nurse in Miami Beach, Florida. The experiences I found there profoundly affect me even today. One night, on call, I was brought into the hospital's Intensive Care Unit where a 42-year-old man had lost his blood pressure. He was recovering from a routine by-pass operation. Not knowing what I could do I prayed that the surgeon would arrive safely on the scene and tell us what to do. He came and proceeded to do a remarkable thing - at least to me. He opened the man's chest reached in and grabbed his heart. He squeezed the heart for minutes at a time raising the blood pressure to normal ranges. I continued to pray.

Then something else remarkable happened. I was ordered to scrub in, gown and glove, and substitute for the only man in the hospital who could save the patient's life. I prayed. I squeezed. I got yelled at for not squeezing hard enough. I prayed again. And squeezed some more. The surgeon rested long enough to get his hand back inside, keep the pressure normal and stabilize the bleeding on the man's heart. The surgical team took the man back to the OR and saved his life.

Until the order was given by the surgeon to assist, I had not fully entered into and shared in this man's life. I was an outsider. I

had some skills and a deep faith that others I worked with knew. Yet, I might as well have read words on a printed page. Until the command was given to share in this man's life and death, only then could I know and understand his need.

God did that for you and me. He reached down inside the soul with the Word of life, Jesus, and touched the very core of our being.

The Word, became flesh so we might understand that God is with us, is personal and desires to communicate. The Divine Logic becomes one of us so we might become one with him.

The Danish Christian philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard has written:

"Although the scribes could explain where the Messiah should be born, they remained quite unperturbed in Jerusalem. They did not accompany the Wise Men to seek him. Similarly we may be able to explain every article of our faith, yet remain spiritually motionless. The power that moved heaven and earth leaves us completely unmoved.

"What a contrast! The three kings had only a rumor to go by. But it spurred them to set out a long, hard journey.

The scribes, meanwhile, were much better informed, much better versed. They had sat and studied the scriptures for years, like so many dons. But it didn't make any difference. Who had the more truth? Those who followed a rumor, or those who remained sitting, satisfied with all their knowledge?"

Jesus comes into our life not by culture, not by our parents nor by our own will. To be adopted means to be chosen. To be chosen by God has nothing to do with who we are or what our name is or what we have done in the past. Ironically, God gave up his Son for human adoption at Christmas time so we in kind might receive and adopt and choose him! What a wonderful thing to be chosen! What a wonderful thing to hear, "I love you and I picked you, even though no one wanted you." No one really wanted Jesus – not his message, not his claims of being God's Son, not his invitation to follow him.

God came at Christmas, giving all that believe him second birth. He did not travel from outer space. He did not come to us from a textbook. He was as near as the gift of faith. He chose us. He gave us life and light to see our way on the journey. We have been given everything to be able to receive him and follow him. We are born of

God when we believe in Jesus. We must receive him to become his children. As The Message says, "These are the God-begotten.

He came to rescue humanity from death. Those who followed Moses out of Egypt did not all reach the Promised Land. Those who hear the gospel preached from generation to generation do not all follow Christ. Yet all God's children come to the true light. They love their adopted Dad. He sent Jesus to search out all those who would come to Him. Adoption of the finite was made possible by the love of the infinite. God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, has made him known. The journey from Bethlehem begins! The shepherds and Wise men continue to sing! The heart of the Father has been revealed! From the fullness of his power we are given the gift of life! Go in peace and live with the gift of Christmas. May we live to see his glory! Amen.