

The Kindness of Strangers—Midwife

I can imagine that when Jesus turned one, on his first birthday, Mary & Joseph talked together about the night he was born. There was so much they remembered of that night—that night which was the first Christmas.

Mary thought back to the baby's first cry and the love which flooded her heart, as the midwife placed Jesus in her arms. There was the wonder of it all, that this tiny infant was God's own Son. She thought of Joseph that winter night, there beside her, strong & steady, keeping watch as she & the baby slept.

She recalled the knock on the door of the stable, [knock] and Joseph going to see who it was, and his hearty welcome, "Come in, come in out of the cold." Shepherds, then, five or six shepherds, she didn't remember exactly now... Two of them, wide-eyed, shepherd boys, and several old ones, leaning on their shepherd's staff. They told of an angel appearing as they kept guard over their flocks outside of town. And the message of the angel, "Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people, for to you is born this day... a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Mary had looked down at the baby—she held in her arms the promised King, the Savior. The shepherds went on to tell that the sky had filled with angels, praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill among men." The shepherds had come as quickly as they could to find the holy child, and now they knelt to worship him.

As Mary remembered that night of Jesus' birth, she thought of the music of that night—the most beautiful music she had ever heard, faint, yet clear, the same song the shepherds had heard

on the hillside. And the light... at first, she had not known why it was so bright in the stable, but Joseph had helped her up and as she hobbled to the doorway, she had seen the magnificent star, shining with brilliance in the sky right above them.

She had slept then, and sometime later heard someone knocking. [knock] She recalled how Joseph had gone to the door, and then his hearty welcome, “Come in, come in out of the cold.” 3 men—obviously men of wisdom and of wealth—from a foreign land—she had difficulty at first understanding their heavily-accented words. But no difficulty understanding their reverence for the child. As though approaching the Holy One, they knelt in worship. They brought him precious gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And then they told their story, of seeing the signs of his birth in the night sky, signs of the greatest king in the history of the earth, they said, and journeying many days, following the brilliant star. But it was their joy which left a lasting impression, the happiness that danced in their eyes, as each one held Jesus close to his heart.

However, of all the strangers who came that night, it was the midwife whom Mary remembered most. Mary had felt so alone there as they settled in to the stable that night. Sure, Joseph was with her, but he, a carpenter, what did he know about giving birth? She missed her mother, and her aunts, and Shiphrah, the midwife at home in Nazareth. She had expected that when she gave birth to her first child, they would be beside her, guiding & encouraging her. Here, she was alone.

But the innkeeper’s wife had asked if she would like the Bethlehem midwife, Puah, to come... She said that Puah had been there when her own son & daughter had been born; she

had assisted in many births, she was skilled and caring... Yes, that would be good, thought Mary... and soon Puah stood beside the bed of straw where Mary lay in the stable.

Kindly, she spoke with Mary, asking about her pregnancy, and then she set about preparing for the birth. The labor pains intensified... coming closer and closer together now... wave after wave of pain that wracked her body... Calmly, Puah spoke soothing words... she held Mary's hand, she wiped the sweat from her brow... She guided her through each contraction, until at last the baby was born. A healthy baby boy, with a loud cry. Puah had washed the child, and wrapped him in strips of swaddling cloth, and placed him in Mary's arms. Before she left, she sang an ancient lullaby of praise to God for the newborn child.

Yes... Mary had so many memories of that holy night. And interwoven with each one, the joy her son had brought into the world... and the love, the love that surrounded them, God's love, God's love for Jesus, for her and Joseph, and the midwife, and shepherds, and wisemen... God's love for all the world.

And now, 2,000 years later, God's love made known in Jesus still fills the world. And like those who knocked on the door of the stable that night, we also hear words of hearty welcome, "Come in, come in out of the cold." We knock on the door of the stable of Bethlehem [knock], and God invites us to lay down our burdens and enter, and see the baby Jesus, sleeping in the manger. And we pause, and hold the child close to our heart, remembering that he is God's own Son, our Savior, our Teacher, our Friend, our Lord.

That's the first half of the Christmas message.

And then, there's something else important here for us... we find it in the kindness of the midwife. When Mary was so alone, far from home, and facing the pain of childbirth with no one to help her, the midwife came to support her.

That's the second half of the Christmas message for us. We know people who are in pain—who are struggling, oftentimes alone. People of all ages—children, youth, college students, young adults, parents, middle-aged, empty-nesters, senior citizens... How could we help? How could we offer encouragement and assistance? How could we be a caring presence in their life? These are questions to ponder at Christmas.

Christmas... from the stable of Bethlehem, to the world of today, we remember the love & light that have come into our lives through the birth of Jesus, God's Son, our Savior. And we share that love & light with others, not just at Christmas, but in all the days to come. Amen.