

Going up to Bethlehem

Donna Mitchell-Moniak

The story of the birth of the Christ child is the birth story of humanity. It is the story of the long journey up to Bethlehem—the house of bread. We are like Mary and Joseph answering a call, set in a direction and not really knowing what will be there. Yet we know we must go.

Pregnant with the Christ within, our spiritual self, Mary, rides atop an animal of servitude and silently endures. Our fortitude, in the guise of Joseph, keeps us moving like the stubborn donkey; his feet walking alongside guiding. Soul has waited a long time for this moment.

This Birth within humanity is a birth of heart; of giving, sharing, of honor and respect. It involves people doing the “right thing,” the simple thing. And so Joseph married Mary, as Mary had said yes to God. The innkeeper found them a dry place to spend the night. Each person simply did the right and conscionable thing; in a real sense the only thing. Humanity today is confronted with the same simple choices: share because it is the right thing to do; trust, give, be honest; care.

The wise men did the right thing too by not telling Herod where the baby lay. Joseph listened to his dream, and took the baby with Mary down to Egypt. Sometimes it is proper to keep a spiritual mystery sacred—not keep it secret, but protect it from the profane. And like Joseph, we must trust when we sense it important to leave situations or relationships that might injure the newly birthed Christ consciousness. In that, we might choose not to go

out drinking with friends, choose not to gossip about another person, might choose to meditate instead of watch television. Like Joseph, we would choose to leave that which is not conducive to our spiritual growth and the growth of the inner Christ presence.

The birth of the Light within requires attendants. The simple shepherds might represent our cells, bodies, and everyday life. Our physical body is the way in which the Word

becomes flesh. Literally, this unassuming part of us is fashioned into the temple of the Lord, the tabernacle of divine presence. As we learn to attend to the body, we attend to the spirit within and to the Light of the world as Christ said.

The Magi also attended his birth. The magi represent the highest and wisest within us, giving the gifts of lifetimes back to ourselves. In the language of Christians, the magi

represent the Holy Trinity. In words familiar to Buddhists, they represent the three jewels of: Buddha nature, *Dharma*/the teaching of light, and *Sangha*/shared life. They also represent body, speech and mind bowing to the Divine Light

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within. In the phraseology of the Trans-Himalayan teachings, the three kings represent the soul in its own majesty, the solar angel, and the monad. These three bear gifts to the incarnating spark of Life and Light, honoring the depths to which Love must descend in order to bring Love into the world. Or they represent another triplicity: *atma*, *buddhi* and *manas*, the will of God, the love of God, and the understanding which God-ness gives.

Humanity also requires birth attendants. All who recognize the Light are these attendants. But like the shepherds and the innkeeper there is no elitism. Those who have been up to Bethlehem, which means those who have experienced the birth of Love in their hearts, know that everyone needs sustenance and shelter. And these Christ-born see all as one and the same as themselves. Thus, the wise men and the shepherds represent those who feel the travail of humanity walking together on the long road to Bethlehem.

That road is archetypal. Many world scriptures tell of this journey back to the house of a king, back to the origins of our true lineage. We are all born of the King—the King of Kings, God. All share a divine heritage. Moses was put in a basket and floated down the River Nile to the house of Pharaoh, the king. Buddha's mother, Maya, journeyed with her royal entourage from the palace of the rainy season to the palace of the sunny season. That palace was also the place of her birth and royal parentage. Joseph, born of the family of King David was called back to Bethlehem, the source of his lineage. Yet all these stories are metaphors of our divine heritage. We are all descended from the King, the Almighty One.

Bethlehem means “the house of bread.” There, all will have plenty because each will understand true need and no one will take more than is needed. And each person will understand how little actually is needed. As a house Bethlehem means shelter. Everyone on the planet wants to be warm, protected and secure. Bethlehem represents food for the body, emotions, mind, and spirit. Symbolically at Bethlehem everyone will be nourished, sustained, and will grow.

The Christmas story is a simple one that says so much. Each time a person awakens to the impulse of giving, Christ is born. Each time a person forgives, Christ is born. Each time a person sees another as equal and looks out to the world, truly saddened by its state of greed and poverty, war, starvation and disease, Christ's tears well up in that person's eyes.

Joseph went up to Bethlehem to be counted in the census, and we are called to be counted too. Almost all world scriptures give a number to the chosen. The number, of course, is immaterial and completely symbolic. Yet to be counted is to be counted upon. As we journey to Bethlehem and birth the Christ presence in our hearts and lives, we too will be counted on to do the right thing, the simple thing: To love, as He did.

Merry Christmas.