

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Dec 27th 2018

Feast of Saint John, Apostle and evangelist

We have hardly had time to spend in the manger with the new parents, Mary and Joseph and their newborn infant son – and of course all of the smells and warmth of the animals. It is no wonder that Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries attached their barns to their homes for the warmth the animals provided. I long to linger. Time spent cuddling an infant to my chest was always the best. Breathing in sweet baby smells. Soft, precious, vulnerable yet so receiving. New life.

In Luke's gospel of the Nativity we hear that the shepherds "...went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and their infant lying in the manger." They were stopped short by the miracle of birth and beauty. But somehow this birth and this baby was different. An extraordinary presence of sacredness, hope, joy and promise permeated the air- mixed with the familiar, the ordinary, the expected warmth and smells of the animals.

Too soon we find ourselves at the empty tomb.

In today's readings from the gospel of John, we hear of Peter and "...the other disciple" running to the tomb where Jesus had been laid after his crucifixion. They too were stopped short by what they saw. The tomb was empty. Jesus was not there. His burial cloths, blood and sweat stained, were strewn around the tomb.

What if I had been there with them – a slow runner brining up the rear.

My mind whirling in confusion. Where can he be? This isn't right. I watched and wept as he slowly, painfully died. I was among the women as we wrapped his wounded body and gently covered his face from view for all time. With a backward glance and reaching out to touch him one last time, I walked away- devastated.

Now what?

Hypnotically making my way back, reflecting on how much I loved Jesus and when was the last time I told him, "I love you, Jesus". I love being in your presence – walking along side, holding your hand.

The joy and comfort I felt when you put your arm around my shoulders or looked into my eyes. The deep quiet and stillness of our being together.' My memories gradually fill me with joy, hope and promise. My grief and sadness come and go, but hope and promise fill the empty spaces.

The infant Jesus was the promise, hope and joy foretold through the centuries. The resurrected Christ is the abiding promise, hope and joy.

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