

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE - JAN. 1, 2012

Reflections

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

'WHERE ARE YOU IN THE CRÈCHE?'

BY DAVID K. POPHAM

With Epiphany coming I find myself contemplating the Icon of the Nativity. Here Joseph is removed from the birth, occupying a lower corner with a forlorn look. Pondering, I searched Google Images to see if Joseph was more respected among other artists. In painting after painting something was between Joseph and the manger – typically Mary. In one painting Mary had her arm outstretched as to keep the infant safe from any harm Joseph might inflict. Are we being told something about the mixture of adult male and infant energies?

Then I searched for images of the crèche to find what these more “folk” representatives of the birth of Jesus might tell me. A majority of the crèches had Joseph in an equal relationship with Mary. Yet something was interjected between the couple and the manger – animals stood closest to the infant.

A poetic truth speaks here as little lambs hang heads over the side of the manger and gaze upon the Great Shepherd. More interesting was the one scene which placed a bull right over the head of Jesus. Moving from these overt religious symbolisms we might consider the folk wisdom that ties animal energies with infants.

Then there is the crèche in my home – the crèche which I personally set up. Indeed, it was true to my sense of “how things are.” People huddled around the manger with animals just beyond them and angels still further out. It was a cosmology jointed with evolution from the big bang (angels) moving through animal life until humans emerge; however, there was one exception.

Later, my youngest daughter played with the crèche. She removed the animals from the stable and put them in the courtyard with the water and the feed. All the people were gathered around adoring the Christ child – all the people except for one (my same exception).

My family’s crèche has a bagpiper as part of the crew. Truthfully, my wife and I do not know what to do with this Scottish intruder upon the birth. I tend to place him toward the furthest end of the courtyard. My daughter’s wisdom placed him right next to the stable, though not in it, as one arriving late – one who knows of Christmas because of Epiphany and the revelation of God’s love to the entire world.

The bagpiper is us as we arrive in our time and milieu to celebrate “the new thing” which God is doing. This is Epiphany as closed-off-pasts and unredeemed-todays open to the transforming compassion of Christ.

*“Come heavenly Brightest, Light divine,
and deep within my heart now shine,
there make yourself an altar!”*

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