

Christmas (B) 12/25/2014

There is a story about a little boy who loves going to church. He loves to sing. He loves looking at the stained glass windows. He loves to listen to the voice of the priest as he talks. The only part about going to church that the little boy doesn't like are the long prayers!

One Sunday, the little boy's parents invite the priest home for dinner... and would you believe it, the little boy's mom asks the priest to pray the prayer of thanksgiving before the meal. *'Oh, no,'* thinks the little boy. *'We'll never get to eat. I'm starving and he'll pray forever!'*

He is surprised, however, when the priest's prayer is brief and to the point. The little boy is so astonished by the short prayer that he looks at the priest and blurts, *'Man, you don't mess around when you're hungry!'*

There are many things that we enjoy about **Christmas**: the music, for example, the tree, and the gifts. There are also some things that we could do without: the traffic, the busy-ness, and the seemingly endless preparations. Our gospel writer, **Luke**, in his rendering of the **Christmas** story, attempts to capture for us something similar.

Joseph and **Mary**, we are told, because of the **Roman** census, travel to **Bethlehem**. Here they encounter large groups of people, who also have traveled, causing all of the inns to be filled. The story continues, telling us that an innkeeper permits the two weary travelers to use a stable. Here, we are told, **Mary** gives birth to **Jesus**.

It is a story of *'what ifs'*. What if **Joseph** and **Mary** don't have to travel? What if **Mary** isn't pregnant? What if there is room in an inn?

What if the birth doesn't happen while they are in **Bethlehem**? What if...?

I suspect that we all have '*what ifs*'. They are moments and events in our lives that don't agree with our **agenda**, or our **expectations**; that feed our **fears**, and cause us to feel **anxious**, **angry** and **depressed**. What if **Mom** and **Dad** got along better; what if I hadn't lost my job; what if I didn't have to visit my in-laws; what if I was able to finish school; what if I hadn't been accused; what if I didn't have these feelings about myself; what if I could just stop drinking...

God - in the birth of **Jesus** - is **with** us in our '*what if*' moments. Our circumstances don't necessarily change, but somehow, somehow we know that we are **okay**; we know that our **small-selves** are embraced by an infinitely **larger self**; we know - to our surprise - that the life for which we **hunger** is not delayed... we are **free** to partake **NOW**.

Merry Christmas!