

How the ICU Gave A New Perspective On Christmas

A Christmas spent in an ICU gave my wife and me new insight into preparing a place for God's presence

There are worse places to be on Christmas Eve than snowy Colorado. Yet after almost a month of being stuck in the neonatal intensive care unit of a Denver hospital, my wife, Amber, and I were more than ready to go home. Our problem: Home was 2,000 miles away in Orlando, Fla., and our doctors weren't about to let Amber, who was barely 24 weeks into an already complicated, high-risk pregnancy, get in an airplane. We desperately wanted to spend Christmas Day with our 4-year-old son, who we hadn't seen in weeks but who at least was safe with family across the country. It became apparent that flight wouldn't happen anytime soon.

Amid our previous plans for holiday shopping, exchanging gifts and Christmas parties, amid our dreams of enjoying candlelight services and carol-filled evenings, that December only one thing mattered: keeping the life inside my wife's womb healthy.

Two thousand years prior, I imagine Mary and Joseph experienced a similar single-mindedness. Obviously, the life inside Mary was infinitely greater, and their circumstances were vastly different. No hospital beds and doctor pagings. No thoughts of Christmas festivities or building gingerbread houses. For this young couple, their sole focus was finding a safe place to deliver Earth's greatest miracle.

But on a parental level, Amber and I likely shared a common sentiment with Mary and Joseph. As the arrival of our child neared, our resolve grew stronger: *We will do whatever it takes to see this glorious baby delivered, because we know*

something great is about to happen.

Expectation at Christmastime will do that to you. There's something about this season and the divine reminder ushered in by December's days that builds our sense of hope. Like kids dreaming of Christmas morning, we expect something big, something deep, something revelational and life-altering. What are you expecting this Christmas? What hope lies deep in your spirit? What life can you feel stirring from within, calling with the voice of a thousand angels heralding the arrival of a divine guest?

If you can sense this, if you share this kind of holy expectation, congratulations—you have cut through the clutter of commercialized, Christ-less “X-mas” frenzy and are instead preparing a place for God's presence. Maybe you can echo the words of Jesus' ancestor, King David: “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Ps. 131:2).

When my wife and I were stuck in that hospital room for weeks, helpless to change our situation, we had no choice but to calm and quiet our souls enough to allow God to enter the situation. Sure enough, He did—and two months later we cried with joy as our “God with us” child arrived safe and healthy (back in Orlando, mind you). Likewise, when Mary and Joseph were desperately seeking shelter in a faraway town yet finding only crowded inns, they had no choice but to calm and quiet their souls enough for God to intervene. And He did, even amid the animal troughs and foul odors of their humble delivery room.

How is the place you've prepared for Jesus this Christmas? Have you nurtured the Holy Spirit's life inside you? Have you yielded to Him with a calmed, quieted soul, or have you squelched His presence by allowing an onslaught of Christmas “stuff” to supercede the reality of Immanuel?

The truth is, God is not as concerned with the external conditions in which He arrives as He is the human heart-houses that will welcome Him. He proved this in a stable 2,000 years ago, and He proves it today each time He enters the dark, hopeless areas of our lives and unexpectedly births light and hope. Our job this Christmas is to prepare our hearts so He can make such an entrance—and stay—not clutter them with frivolous activity that crowds Him out like an inn with no room for the Messiah.

We have the opportunity—even amid the busyness of this season—to house God's presence. I urge you: Do whatever it takes to welcome Him with a prepared heart ... and then watch what great things can happen once He arrives!

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