

Humble Heroes

The most fascinating thing about the Christmas story is the humility of it all. The Son of God arrived on this earth in a no-name town, and His parents didn't have the financial means to get a decent motel room on the night of His birth. His mother used an animal's feeding trough for a crib, and Jesus' first baby blanket was not the garment of royalty but coarse strips of linen woven by Hebrew peasants.

Hardly anybody noticed His arrival. There were no red carpets or movie cameras. There were no dignitaries, press releases or fancy receptions with wine and caviar. Angels appeared—but they spoke only to a group of shepherds who then brought their smelly animals to that first Christmas celebration.

Bethlehem was not Hollywood. God became incarnate in human flesh in the most humble of human locations—a stable on the backside of nowhere. And when Jesus grew up, He never acted like a star even though He was worthy of the entire world's adoration. He spent most of His ministry healing blind beggars, feeding multitudes of poor people and hanging around with prostitutes and lepers.

He was God! Yet He lived like a servant. And before He was executed like a common criminal, He rode on a donkey, put on a towel and washed His followers' feet to remind them to act like servants, too.

Is this the gospel we preach today? I don't think so.

Humility has become passé. It doesn't fit into our egotistical

world of liposuction, breast implants, image coaches and celebrity worship. In the church today, it's no longer popular to take the lowest seat at the banquet or to identify with the poor or the untouchable. We've risen above that. We're all too eager to claim the front row.

Two years ago a prominent charismatic preacher flew to Tulsa in his private jet and then bragged to a group of ministers that he never flies commercial airplanes anymore. "That would be admitting that I don't have faith," he supposedly told them. If I follow this man's logic, I would have to wear an Armani suit, drive a Lexus and live in a palace with a four-car garage and an in-home theater in order to have a testimony.

I think this preacher missed the meaning of Christmas. When I read the story of Jesus' birth, it tells me that if He began His work in lowly Bethlehem, I'd better be hanging around mangers and poor shepherds if I want a Christlike ministry.

We need to revisit the manger—and the people you will read about in this Christmas issue will help you make that pilgrimage. Many of the unsung heroes on our cover this month have never been featured in a magazine article before, and they probably don't care that we are shining the spotlight on them now.

But I think they deserve more recognition than some of the "big names" we tend to applaud. These folks have been willing to identify with the weakest among us. They care about the forgotten elderly, homeless bag ladies, terminally ill kids, drug-addicted teens, unreached Native American tribes and AIDS orphans.

These ordinary saints do the work of Jesus whether anyone notices or not. I hope their stories will inspire you to bend down, embrace humility and take the miracle of Christmas to a lowly stable near you.