

Ruth Bell Graham: Imagine the First Christmas

Imagine living in Bethlehem and seeing two people coming along the dusty road down in the valley, a man walking and a woman riding a donkey. How slowly they came. They stopped often to rest. Why did they stop so often, now that their journey was almost over?

Again they stopped, this time in front of you, and when you saw the woman's face, your heart gave a leap. For on this young woman's face, pale and travel-weary, was a smile that seemed to reflect all the joy of heaven.

That night you were wide awake. Somehow you knew that it was a special night, that something wonderful was about to happen. Something so wonderful that you almost were afraid to breathe for fear of breaking the stillness.

For tonight Bethlehem was very still. Listening. Waiting for something.

Very late in the night there was a commotion out on the street. You could hear men shouting, and you run to the door and stare at those men shouting in the night.

What were they saying? They had seen an angel!

The angel had told them about a Baby born in Bethlehem, and they called the Baby "Savior" and "Lord." With their own eyes they had seen the Baby in a stable behind an inn.

You don't wait to hear any more, and you run to the inn and around the inn to the stable. Then, slowly, softly, you enter.

There she is. The young woman with the radiant smile. Leaning against a stall. Her eyes closed. The man standing at her side.

Behind them, in a manger, is the Baby. Tiny. Wrapped tightly in linen cloth. Sleeping as soundly as any newborn baby. Sleeping as though the world had not waited thousands of years for this moment. Sleeping as though your life and my life, and the lives of everyone on earth, were not wrapped up in His birth. Sleeping as though, from this moment on, all the sin and the sorrow of the world were not His problem.

Should you ask her if you may touch the Baby—not wake Him, just touch His hand? What a moment that would be! To reach out and touch the Son of God!

Yet I don't envy the people who lived in Bethlehem that night, for they couldn't have understood all that this Baby was born to do: to speak words of joy to an unhappy world, to show love to people too used to hatred, to win victory over the sin and the sorrow of the world.

You and I are greatly blessed to live now when His work of love is finished. He is as close to us today as He was to those in Bethlehem. Closer, for today we do not have to reach out our hands to touch Him.