

God's Story and Our Story

The Solemnity of Christmas is celebrated with four sets of scripture readings for the Masses of vigil, midnight, dawn and day. Each set of readings presents a different facet of the mystery of the Incarnation.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we touch the need of the early Christian community to trace the lineage of Jesus back to King David, since it was from his house that the messiah would come. We sense the tension and drama experienced by Joseph as he struggles to accept Mary as his wife when he learns of her pregnancy before their marriage.

Matthew calls us into the longing of the people of Israel for the fulfillment of promises uttered through ancient prophets; promises finally fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

The nativity story recounted in the Gospel of Luke includes those who are poor and powerless, yet not without hope. The shepherds, who are among the least in society at this time, go with joy to see for themselves the child whose birth is announced by angels. We also get a glimpse of Mary somewhat bemused by all of the attention. The Gospel says, "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart."

Finally, the celebration of Christmas takes a mystical turn as we reflect on the Gospel of John, which opens us to the reality that Eternal Word, having existed before all time, has been born in time as one like us – the timeless enters time, the creator has entered creation.

History, drama, hope, joy, bemusement and deep mystery are all part of the Christmas story in our liturgical celebrations.

And are not these elements a part of the sacred stories of our lives as well? Every element in the story of Jesus also belongs to us. We can choose any one of them and tell the story of our own family history, our personal dramas, hopes, joys and even experiences for which we have yet to fully understand the meaning. These elements belong to the stories of our communities and our nation. And they belong to the health ministries we serve.

This insight invites us deeper into the mystery we celebrate at Christmas, for it is less about the birth of a child in unusual circumstances, and much more about a God whose life is our life. God becomes, in a sense, the leaven in the dough of our lives, changing, or perhaps more accurately, revealing, the nature of who we are as God's people.

We cannot ignore the implications of this for those who serve in the health care ministry. The “why” of what we do each day is intimately connected to this understanding. And it is less important that those we serve understand it and all the more important that we who serve do.

As we celebrate this great mystery of Christmas, what must we do to invite others into this insight so that their stories, like the story of our God, become one with ours?