

RE

TELLING THE STORY

THE BIRTH OF JESUS



ALEXANDER ANDUJAR

Once upon a time, when I was a new seminary graduate, I taught Sunday School to elementary and middle school students. One week, we talked about how we would tell the story of Jesus' birth to our friends who might not have heard the story before.

Some of us can't imagine that there are people who don't know anything about Bethlehem or donkeys, or why Mary and Joseph were running around the countryside when she was about to give birth, or why the angels show up. But many people don't know this story—one of the very best stories of our Christian faith—and if we tell them the story the way we heard it, they might still be confused. One brilliant young person said she would tell her friends that it would be like Jesus had been born in a car, because there was no room for his family in a hotel.

Later, I met a young man who asked many questions about Jesus. Tim had never been to church or read the Bible,

but he knew there was something more and he wanted to dig deeper into this faith. He didn't speak "church talk." I struggled with how to tell him the story of Jesus in a way he could understand. And then, I remembered the wise words of my Sunday School class.

In this re-telling of the nativity story, you will meet Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. You'll hear angels sing and the joy of Jesus' birth shared by folks who will seem very familiar.

When the story of Jesus becomes our own story, we come close to the very beating heart of God. Inviting Jesus to be the center of our story changes the way we talk about our lives, the way we tell our stories, and the way we treat our neighbors. Sharing this ancient and life-changing story in a modern context is one way to draw us ever closer, a reminder to us that we are all in this together—that there is only the family of God, no "us and them."

Re-Telling the Story

The needle on the dashboard gauge points to EMPTY. Two headlights cut the darkness. Mile after mile, sign after sign reads: NO VACANCY. Families line the streets; traffic is snarled at every intersection. Restaurants are full, and grocery stores have been picked over. Everyone who grew up here has come back to town to pay their taxes and see their families.

María and her husband José are no different—just two more people taking care of business. Like most of their friends and family, they are poor. Like a lot of the couples they know, they are also expecting a baby. This trip couldn't have come at a worse time—there's no money for anything other than the taxes, and Maria's due date is rapidly approaching.

“There's one,” says María, pointing toward a brightly lit motel. José pulls into the parking lot. The car shudders as the engine stalls and cuts off. They

are literally riding on gas fumes. This is the last stop, whether it's the right stop or not.

“Let's hope we have some luck,” says José. “We have to stop for the night.” María nods and moans, with some urgency. Their baby is about to enter the world.

José bolts out of the car and runs into the lobby, jangling the service bell. “How may I help you tonight, sir?” asks the manager.

“My wife and I need a room, please.” José skips the part about María being about to have a baby...like any motel manager would welcome an unassisted birth in the middle of the night in one of their rooms.

The manager informs José that the tax holiday has all the rooms booked up—there's not a room in town.

“We just...we can't sleep in the car. Is there anything, any place we can stretch

out? My wife really needs a place to rest.” The desperation in José’s voice seems to cut through the manager’s matter-of-fact dismissal.

“I’ve got a tool shed around the back of the building...it’s not much, but it’s the only place left in town. There are some moving blankets and an old mattress out there. Make yourselves comfortable...no charge. Here are some bottles of water and a couple of bags of pretzels.” The manager looks worried, but this is the best he can do for the young couple.

“Thanks. I appreciate it. We’ll take it.” José shakes the manager’s hand and heads back to the car to tell María they can stop and rest here for the night. Their hearts sink at the sight of the shed—this is not how they imagined having their first baby. But at least they aren’t still on the road, and they have a roof over their heads.