

At Home in Christ's Body

Meditations for Christmas Week

"...this Christmas I am meditating upon the biblical figures that helped make a way for the coming of Christ. As I consider them, I am discovering fresh grace for the good hard 'church' road we have been walking since leaving California..."

By Andrew Comiskey



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Before me as I write is an exquisite three-piece nativity set from Utrecht, Holland. Joseph is the largest figure—strong and protective. Perhaps Joseph also represents God the Father. He stretches his arms out over Mary, who sits quietly, beholding Jesus as if marveling at His life.

To me, she represents the Church, the body of Christ; we like Mary bear Christ in our various gatherings. We manifest Him. Out of our devotion to Him, we like Mary are enabled and entrusted by the Father to adore the Son, and to make Him known out of our love for Him.

This Christmas time, I am meditating on my relation to Christ's body, pondering who and where I am in relation to the Church. It has been a good hard road of discovery.

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*"He has scattered those who are proud
in their innermost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers
from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty."*

Luke 1:51b-53

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At Home in Christ's Body...

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Five years ago, my family and a portion of the Desert Stream staff moved to Kansas City to become a part of the International House of Prayer (IHOP). It was a huge shift for us, both culturally and spiritually, as it involved leaving our beloved home in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. With a couple of exceptions, most of our elders blessed the move, and the DSM Board released us to Kansas City.

IHOP is a unique and powerful expression of Christ's body. Yet it became apparent after about two years that this was not our home. The reasons were two-fold. Mike Bickle and I sought to work out a couple of differences; for me, those differences became unbridgeable. And the focused commitment IHOP asks of its members began to interfere with my call to lead DSM.

Because Annette and I were very involved at IHOP, it took about another year to disengage from that community. We then began to reinvest in a smaller church that was more compatible with our values and

needs, including our need to attend to the demanding nature of DSM.

Having spent one year exploring the move to IHOP, two years trying to make it work, and another year of disengaging from it, we were exhausted. And confused. Do we know anything about the Father and His leading? Where do we belong in the Church? How do we rediscover Mary's composure in simply being the Body and saying 'yes' yet again to bearing Christ in His Church?

That was two years ago. God has been faithful to us. This Christmas I am meditating upon the biblical figures that helped make a way for the coming of Christ. As I consider them, I am discovering fresh grace for the good hard 'church' road we have been walking since leaving California. I hope you discover that same grace.

Together, I pray that we might discover Christ afresh in His body. Like Mary and Joseph, may we adore Him. When two or more are gathered in His name, He is there to be worshiped.

Please use these seven meditations as a prayer guide for the seven days leading up to Christmas. Each one will highlight an advent figure that God has used to encourage me in my pursuit of Christ through His Church; may each figure also equip us to help others find Christ in His body, even as we have been helped. **DSM**



DECEMBER 19TH

JOHN THE BAPTIST

"...it was John who first looked upon Christ and named Him

'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...'"

The prophet John makes the way for us. His voice is loud and His message of repentance is piercingly clear: Don't let your heart grow cold toward Jesus in His Church! John's world is the desert, a harsh place but also a place of solitude that can become a place of encounter with God.

Could it be that God uses our disillusion with His community to invite us into deeper intimacy with Himself?

That is harder than it sounds—the defenses of the heart are subtle. The writer of Hebrews implores us to not let our hearts grow hard through sin's deceitfulness. (3: 13)

Once we realize that we are disappointed with the body, we can name it. Instead of making a person or institution the enemy, we can point out the real enemy—the sin in us that is calcifying. We can then receive John's invitation to repent, not as an act of denying the hurt, but unto Christ and His consolation amid the hurt.

The Baptist helps us here. It was John who first looked upon Christ and named Him 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' (Jn 1:29) We can unhook from a mere creature or community and turn to the lamb. He burns bright with love for us, a love so stern and splendid that we no longer

see another's failure; we see Him, and in turn seek only to be pleasing to Him.

'The friend who attends to the bridegroom waits and listens for Him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice.' (Jn 3:29)

We listen, and ask that He might speak into the uncertainty at hand. May He increase, and become our certainty this Christmas time. May we listen with the Baptist's ear, and look with His eye, as we wait for His leading into His body. **DSM**

DECEMBER 20TH

Z E C H A R I A H

“...Christ is less concerned with our ‘rightness’ than He is about our love—our love for Him, and the bride He loves so much...”

The community reveals our failures. We may at times be acutely aware of another’s. Yet we can be sure of one thing. Behind every bandage we wear are stones we intend to throw at our wounders in the church.

I am amazed at the tenacity of my wounds. Just when I think I have forgiven, I hear my defensive words or see my pinched face in response to a particular community. And I know I am not done forgiving; I am not yet free to behold and bless the whole body to which Christ is returning.

During my good hard talks with Mike Bickle at IHOP, I became aware of how harsh and unloving I can be. Thinking myself faithful and true, I discovered in Mike a mirror that revealed something else—a man so intent on a particular truth that I lost an aspect of a greater truth, the law of love and kindness.

And the Lord disciplined me. He made clear He wanted to refine that hard quality so that my heart would not needlessly offend others in the church.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, thought himself faithful and true; he observed the law blamelessly. (Lk 1: 6) Yet his tight religious world could not fathom the angelic prophesy of his son John’s birth. Zechariah wanted proof; God insisted on a faithful response to His miracle for Zechariah.

As a result of his flawed response to the Lord, Zechariah lost his voice. That was his discipline. He simply could not speak. That gave him a lot of time to think about what happened, to pull back, to be still and know that God is God and will do what He wills.

When Christ’s community is not what we want, or when we seem to not be what others want, we experience a loss of voice. We struggle to see or hear the angel of annunciation prophesying the miraculous good of Christ in His body.

That is where we must embrace the discipline of Christ through His church. He is less concerned with our ‘rightness’ than He is about our love—our love for Him, and the bride He loves so much.

When we left IHOP, I felt adrift and mute. Yet I knew He was still loving me, seeking to work good in me. I took heart at Zechariah’s flawed response to holy things. Could my flawed response to a broken dream become a type of discipline, the ground in which God sows seeds of righteousness and peace in me? (Heb 12: 11)

Our suffering in relation to the church must allow for our discipline; God in His mercy rarely allows us to simply be the victim. We may find that we, not ‘them’, are the ones with such a long way to go on the good hard road to loving others well. It may take a long time to reap a harvest. Discipline always feels longer than it is!

But take heart. God is with us, more concerned with our becoming good than in our feeling good. In the meantime, we open our ears and eyes to the Christ who is there, ever true and intent on making us true in relation to what He loves most—His bride, the Church. **DSM**

DECEMBER 21ST

E L I Z A B E T H

“...The church is not the ground for establishing our significance; we attend to the bride because it is His most authentic expression on earth. He wants our love for her...”

We can be full of good things for the church—ideas, truths, programs—and yet not ready to offer them. We may need like Zechariah a gestation period—a quiet season of ‘pregnancy’ before we are ready to be fruitful for the church.

God wants our love to be apparent for His bride. The church is not the ground for establishing our significance; we attend to the

bride because it is His most authentic expression on earth. He wants our love for her.

Sometimes we must wait a little. As we wait, we need partnership. God is faithful to provide men and women who stand with us. When Mary was pregnant, God provided Elizabeth as a waiting partner. While Jesus grew in Mary, Elizabeth spoke words of life to her, profound encouragement that helped her to remember the

amazing purposes of God for her life. Elizabeth’s words anchored Mary during a time when her world was turned upside down by the mysterious life growing in her. (Lk 1: 38-45)

When Annette and I became aware that IHOP was not to be our home, we were disoriented at least. Through two special friends, we heard a sustaining word:

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DECEMBER 22ND

JOSEPH

"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Mt 20-21)

I am continually inspired by Joseph in the nativity piece I described at the onset of these meditations. He stretches out his arms to shield Mary. And it makes me want to do the same for the Church. To use my strength as a man to guard her honor—that rings true to me.

I recall a painting of a beautiful bride who had fallen in the mud. She looked out of place, her gown torn, her bearing unsteady as if she might not be able to get up without help. According to the artist, it was a rendering of the Church, Christ's bride.

The painting brought to mind Paul's words when he described his battering in ministry: 'Struck down but not destroyed, always bearing in the body the death of Christ so that His life might be more manifest still...' (2Cor 4: 9, 10)

The Church bears Christ's death so that His life might be more evident still. She is so weak at times, subject to such internal

weakness and external pressure that it seems she might not make it. And yet she bears an amazing capacity to renew herself; she bears the unfathomable Christ, who is ever faithful in love to pick her up where she has fallen. He sees who she is becoming; His true vision of her and her destiny calls her out from all manner of distress.

If in truth Mary is a type or foreshadowing of the Church, then we can understand why she needed one as courageous as Joseph to help her. He stood with her from the onset of her pregnancy to the birth and rearing of Christ. A woman is never more vulnerable than when with child; couple that with Mary bearing the Messiah of the Universe and you have a woman under fire!

We catch a glimpse of this protective advocacy in Matthew 1:19 when Joseph learned of her pregnancy. Aware that he was not the father, he sought to quietly dissolve their vows as to not shame her publicly. Then

God spoke to him in a dream, and granted Joseph a higher, truer vision of Mary and her destiny. (vs. 20, 21) Envisioned by God as to the true nature of mother and Child, Joseph then resolutely set out to ensure a safe passage for them both. (v. 24)

I want that same vision and protective spirit toward the Body of Christ. I want to exemplify Joseph's advocacy of the Church. It is too easy to see her distress and to forsake her for it. The true man fights for her honor.

That means refusing to gossip about her, and instead calling naysayers to speak their truth in love to the churchmen or women in question. It means believing in her best, and seeking with all one's strength and effort to become a part of her solution. It means quietly imparting love and advocacy for the beloved bride, giving her what she needs in her messier moments, not necessarily what she deserves.

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DECEMBER 23RD

THE THREE KINGS

"...All we can do is worship Him. The three Kings show us that.

Their humility reveals our pride, our natural distractedness that makes idols of our ideas..."

I have never related to kings. They seem too high, too ornate, too far from my populist sensibilities. And yet these kings, high atop camels, bearing the riches of unjust kingdoms, got low before the Christ-child. They descended their camels and thrones and worshiped the Child-King. (Mt 2:11)

In so doing, these three kings give me no excuse when I consider my own concerns more important than the devotion due

Christ. He is present when two or more faithful ones gather; how dare I not recall what He did for me at Bethlehem and Calvary that gave me access to His Throne? Before Him, we are all reduced to helpless ones whom He lifted out of disgrace.

All we can do is worship Him. The three Kings show us that. Their humility reveals our pride, our natural distractedness that makes idols of our ideas.

When Annette and I found ourselves outside of IHOP and in a new church, all we could do was worship Him in the assembly. We barely knew anyone, so relationships did not mean much yet. But He was there. And as we sang the praises that He alone deserved, God quickened His knitting of us into His body.

We have a good pedigree for worship—the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. The base of

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The Three Kings

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the Vineyard is worship—giving God what is due Him through humble, simple songs of love and gratitude. From the beginning of our lives together, Annette and I attended the Vineyard. We sang our way into marital love and ministry. We remember mercy and we respond gratefully in worship. That has paved the way for every good and hard thing we have encountered in His Church.

Like the Kings, we needed to know when it was time to journey from one expression of the body to the next. We still ache at the thought of not attending a Vineyard; it is our DNA, our heart, its songs are our songs. And yet it was time to go.

The Kings received a dream from the Lord; they had to journey from the site of their initial worship in order to truly worship the One in obedience to His lead. (Mt 2:12) So we too had to obey the Lord of the Church and not the original church of our youth.

So it was with IHOP. I remember with tears the Presence of Jesus there in which worshipping Him resulted in the most dynamic prayer meetings I have ever experienced. Yet it was time to go. We need to discern when this is, and we need to go when He says go.

No-one can discern this for us absolutely. Only One stands over and above the Church, and that is Christ, who alone judges perfectly our comings and goings in His one body. **DSM**

DECEMBER 24TH

MARY

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.” (Lk 1:52-53)

She is the Church, to be hailed as the bearer of all grace. ‘For the Mighty One has done great things for me!’ (Lk 1:49) proclaims Mary, our advent representative of the Church.

Yes, the Mighty One has done great things for us, His bride. He has come to dwell with man, not only in His becoming flesh and dying for us, but in Him raising us up to be members of His very body on earth. According to Paul, we are being built together as a living temple whose head and heart is Christ; He indwells and renews and holds His Church together with His Spirit. (Eph 2: 21, 22; 4: 15, 16)

We are a composite of Mary herself, the bearer of Christ, endued with a corporate grace that sends away the rich and casts down kings, while feeding the hungry and exalting the poor. (Lk 1: 52, 53)

We can have such a prophetic, pastoral impact because He is faithful through His body to feed us in the very same way—humbling us through all manner of hardship then feeding us exquisitely from the graces He gives uniquely to us through His bride.

I have been meditating of late upon the big question raised by our move to Kansas City: why God? Yes He has been faithful to grace us with the goodness of IHOP and the blessing of our church, New Day Fellowship. But the sheer cost of the transition—why God?

Then I recall the ways He has humbled us in these last 5 years and caused us to hunger, feeding us on the diverse delicacies of His body in Kansas City—a smorgasbord that I dare say would have eluded us in Southern California. (Deut. 8: 2-5)

I recall the countless pastors’ gatherings I have attended in Kansas City, city-wide and one-on-one, getting up close and personal with shepherds of many stations and flavors. Why? Because I knew so few. I needed to break out of my comfort zone and gather in order to discover the body in a new land.

And what a gathering! I have rediscovered the beauty of the Vineyard through three unique expressions of that denomination in one city. I have been prayed for, refreshed, and encouraged by the many youthful IHOPers who blessedly by their sheer volume are taking over southern Kansas City.

I have met humble representatives from all the major denominations who long to minister better to their broken ones.

Doors in God’s Roman Catholic Church are opening as they never did in Southern California—I am privileged to partner with amazing men and women who long to awaken faith and purity in parishes throughout Missouri and Kansas.

And God has given Annette and I a place to serve—to extend our volunteer service in our local fellowship. Annette is in charge of food drives for the poor there, and I serve the healing groups that the church sponsors: Living Waters, CrossCurrent, and Beauty and the Breach.

I am most alive when I am in the heart of Mary, alive to His bride and the nearness of Jesus there: worshipping Him, discovering the gifts He gives through her to the poor, bearing with her weaknesses, and receiving grace upon grace upon grace. There is nowhere else I want to be this Christmas.

The Church is my heart’s true home. **DSM**

DECEMBER 25TH

POUNDERING CHRIST IN HIS BODY

"...Worship the Child-King for the many ways He has made Himself known to you through His body on earth..."

Merry Christmas to you. On this day of days, I urge you (along with carols and gifts, and many forms of good cheer) to consider the faithful ones who brought Christ near to you. Mary once again is our witness.

In Luke 1:8-20, amid an open heaven full of angels and an impassioned earth heralding the Child-King, Mary pondered the immensity of what God had in store for the babe in her arms. Luke says that 'Mary treasured all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' (v.19)

Such composure freed her to stay grounded, and to stay focused on the babe at her breast. In the spectacle of stars and kings, she never lost sight of the humble witness of God-become-man. So might we this

Christmas consider those who have been the body of Christ for us—His eyes and ears and words and touch that brought divine Presence on earth to us.

We honor this day the Christ who is present in His body. We celebrate You Jesus, You composed of diverse members who have met us in different times and seasons of our lives—mystically, profoundly, in the most mundane ways possible.

I urge you this Christmas to ponder the many faces, and to recollect the graces they have given. Be grateful. Worship the Child-King for the many ways He has made Himself known to you through His body on earth.

We praise Jesus this holy day, Emmanuel, God-with-us. **DSM**

Elizabeth

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"IHOP served God's purposes by bringing you out to Kansas City; God's purposes will become clear to you in time. He will make His purposes for you in the Church here when He is ready."

We needed that! It rang true for us, and helped us to wait for the fullness of God's purposes for us. In the meantime, we hunkered down in a lovely small-scale church and just started to serve in the little ways that we could. We began to discover afresh the presence of Jesus there. Joined with others, we began to find Him in the community amid the uncertainties of our own lives.

We needed our 'Elizabeths' to make that transition back into a local community. And God was faithful to send them. Their encouragement at such a critical time makes me want to encourage others similarly. **DSM**

Joseph

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I love how Mike B. did this for me. He heard my truth and he saw my flaws. He loved me consistently through both. My pastor Lloyd bears with members of the bride in a way that puts me to shame. Both men use their masculine power to believe and hope and endure in love for the Church, for the Christ who remains evident to them in His deeply flawed members. I am one.

May I in turn become their type of Joseph who suffers long for Mary: the Church still becoming a spotless bride, faithful in response to His unflinching love for her. **DSM**



Year-End 2009

Publisher/Editor—Andrew Comiskey
Art Direction—Immanuel Communications

DESERT STREAM MINISTRIES
PUBLISHES THE FOLLOWING:

Newsletter (Spring and Fall)
Mid-Year Report (Summer)
Year-End Report (Winter)

Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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