

Matthew 1:18—2:23

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ ²²All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: (Isaiah 7:14)

²³ ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us.’ ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

2:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd^a my people Israel.” ’ (Micah 5:2)

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

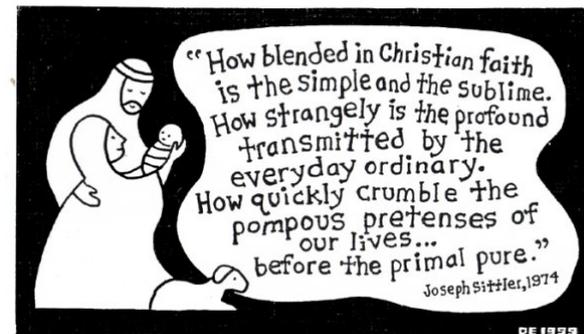
¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ ¹⁴Then Joseph^{*} got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’ (Jeremiah 31:15)

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’



UNILATERALISM OR GOD'S VULNERABILITY

Why are you so one-sided
people often ask me
so blind and so unilateral
I sometimes ask in return
are you a Christian
if you don't mind my asking

And depending on the answer I remind them
how one-sidedly and without guarantees
God made himself vulnerable in Christ
where would we end up
I offer for consideration
if God insisted on bilateral agreements
with you and me
who welsch on treaties
by resorting to various tricks
where would we end up
if God insisted on bilateral agreements
before he acted

Then I remind them
that God didn't come in an armored car
and wasn't born in a bank
and gave up the old miracle weapons
thunder and lightning and heavenly hosts
one-sidedly
palaces and kings and soldiers
were not his way when he
decided unilaterally
to become a human being
which means to live without weapons

Dorothee Soelle, *Of War and Love*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1983



LAYLAT AL-MILAD

Laylat al-Milad, the Night of Christmas, is sung by Christians across the Middle East each year as one of the traditional Arab Christmas carols. The words of Lebanese priest Father Labaki strike a poignant chord with people of Palestine as they sing of burying war and putting away hatred.

Refrain

On the night of Christmas ... Hatred will vanish
On the night of Christmas ... The Earth blooms
On the night of Christmas ... War is buried
On the night of Christmas ... Love is born

When we offer a glass of water to a thirsty person, we are in Christmas
When we clothe a naked person with a gown of love, we are in Christmas
When we wipe the tears from weeping eyes, we are in Christmas
When we cushion a hopeless heart with love, we are in Christmas

When I kiss a friend without hypocrisy, I am in Christmas
When the spirit of revenge dies in me, I am in Christmas
When hardness is gone from my heart, I am in Christmas
When my soul melts in the Being of God, I am in Christmas

THE WORD

The Word, for our sake, became poverty
clothed as the poor who live off the refuse heap.
The word, for our sake, became a sob a thousand times stifled
in the immovable mouth of the child who dies from hunger.
The Word, for our sake, became danger in the anguish of the mother
who worries about her son growing to manhood.
The Word cut us deeply in that place of shame:
the painful reality of the poor.
The Word blew its spirit over the dried bones of the churches,
guardians of silence.
The Word awoke us from the lethargy which had robbed us of our hope.
The Word became a path in the jungle, a decision on the farm,
love in women, unity among workers,
and a Star for those few who can inspire dreams.
The Word became light.
The Word became history.
The Word became conflict.
The Word became indomitable spirit,
and sowed its seeds upon the mountain,
near the river and in the valley,
and those of good will heard the angels sing.
Tired knees were strengthened, trembling hands were stilled,
and the people who wandered in the darkness saw the light.
The Word became the seed of justice and we conceived peace.
The Word made justice to rain
and peace came forth from the furrows in the land.
And we saw its glory in the eyes of the poor
transformed into real men and women.
And those who saw the star
opened up for us the path we now follow.

Julia Esquivel, *Threatened with Resurrection*, 1982,
in *Bread of Tomorrow*, ed. By Janet Morely, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 1992