

The Gift of the Christ Child Within

by Rev. Elder Dwayne Johnson

“I think that we have hardly thought through the immense implications of the mystery of the incarnation.”

Henri Nouwen, *You Are the Beloved*

I’m thinking about the shepherds in Luke’s gospel. I can’t begin to imagine what was spinning in their heads and rushing in their hearts. In Luke 2:8-20 the shepherds are minding their own business, guarding the sheep. Then an angel appears, frightening them to their core. Calming their fears, the angel shares good news: “The Savior has been born tonight in Bethlehem. . .you will find this baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth.”

Before the shepherds could comprehend what they’ve just heard, the angel is joined by a mass choir of angels that sings an early version of the Hallelujah Chorus: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all!” Then the angels return to heaven as quickly as they arrived. The shepherds, still stunned, run to Bethlehem. And there they “found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.”



The shepherds go to tell everyone what had happened, describing the promise and praises of the angels. People are astonished by the news. Then, the shepherds go back to their flocks, praising God.

This is a wonderful story, at the heart of the celebration of the coming of Jesus. And... I’m wondering what the shepherds were thinking a month or so later. Had the drudgery of daily routine dampened their enthusiasm? Were they starting to question their memories? Did their

experience seem too good to be true? Had they grasped “the immense implications of the mystery of the incarnation?”

Obviously I can’t answer the questions for the shepherds. However I can ponder these questions for myself. I acknowledge that at times, daily routine dulls the edge of my faith. Sometimes, I think back on moments of spiritual breakthrough, and it feels removed from the present. I recall the power of the amazing grace of our faith, and it does seem a bit too good to be true.

That’s when it is time to get back to the story. That’s when it is time to return to the manger. There, at the manger, gazing at the Christ Child, the full implications of the mystery are ready to be revealed. What are the full implications? A full implication is that the Christ Child actually leaves the manger. Another full implication is that this Child grows up to be the One who brings healing and wholeness to the world. This Christ Child grows up to face everything we will face.

Where is the Christ Child now? The implication of the mystery is that the Christ Child has moved from the manger to our hearts. Unlike the shepherds, we don’t have to travel from our workplaces to experience Jesus. For us, there is no distance at all. What we need to live in this world is within us. The wholeness and power of our faith is not just a story we visit once a year, but a way of living that keeps us at the center of joy.