

Today's Advent Devotional is provided by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

Mary Christmas!

It was late on December 23, 1959 (I was 13) on our tree farm in Michigan when I went down to the barn to check on my sheep (a 4H project started when I was 10). The reason I went just before bedtime was that one of the ewes had become pregnant earlier than we had planned and was getting large. It seemed her time was coming.

So I checked again in the morning, and then after supper (the 24th). I came back from that latter visit sure she would deliver soon.

My parents and I went to Christmas Eve late service. When we returned, I changed my clothes and went to the barn. Sure enough, she was in active labor. I went back to the house to get my father. Soon after we returned, about 1 a.m., out came the lamb!

L



Lambs are adorable. As soon as their mothers lick them clean of birth fluids, they to stand on wobbly legs and bleat the cutest little baa's.

But this one was special, not only because she was born on Christmas Day, but also because we were not supposed to have lambs at that time of year. We wanted lambs to arrive closer to Easter when they would be higher priced on the Detroit livestock market (I was not a vegetarian yet!).

But somehow, the ram got in where he was not supposed to be (my father and I never stopped wondering when it happened and why only one ewe got pregnant).

The result was the beautiful little creature whom I promptly named "Merry Christmas" (all my sheep had names).

When we went back to the house, my mother reminded me that as a child I made a Christmas card for them which carried the greeting "Mary Christmas!" She suggested that was the correct spelling of our new lamb's name. And so it was.

When market time came in the Spring, Mary Christmas! did not go with the other younger lambs. She remained in my small flock until I left for college and had to send them to market.

I think of her fondly every Christmas and often wonder if there had been some sort of immaculate conception (her birth was humble like Jesus'). Frankly, I have long been skeptical of biblical claims about his origins, but at the same time, I wonder.....I know all births are holy and with God all things are possible!

This memory has been an occasion of repeating joy for me for 60 years.