

Christmas Men

We often focus on Mary when we look at the Christmas story, probably because it can seem hard to find women characters in many Biblical stories. And when we do find stories of women we tend to reflect on them as women. Conversely when we look at stories about men we tend to ignore that they have a specific gender and treat them as the norm. This was an attempt to redress this balance and reflect on the male characters in the Christmas story as men.

An ordinary man, Joseph,
hands roughened
yet used to shaping the contours of wood
turning, crafting
bringing beauty and functionality to the fore
making the objects of everyday necessity.

An ordinary man, Joseph,
father to be, receiver of dreams
traveller and refugee
known more for marrying Mary
and raising Jesus
than for any achievement of his own.

Who is the ordinary man, today's Joseph?
hands roughened
laying bricks and pipes and cables
crafting kitchens and bathrooms
bringing beauty and functionality to the fore
making the objects of everyday necessity.

Who is the ordinary man, today's Joseph?
father to be, dreaming a better life for a growing family
traveller and refugee
known more for derogatory newspaper headlines
of economic migrant workers
than for the achievement of making a new start.

An ordinary man, the inn keeper
known by profession not name
shrewd small time business man
hotellier and landlord
turning the sudden demand of bureaucratic proclamation
to the upturn of economic advantage.

An ordinary man, the inn keeper
known more for the no vacancy sign
than for offering the hospitality of his trade
yet this is the man who thinks on his feet
who finds room for yet more travellers
who makes a maternity unit out of a stable.

Who is the ordinary man, today's inn keeper?
known by reputation, not by name
struggling to keep up with the refurbishment's of big hotel chains

barman and landlord
lurching from short summer tourist and conference seasons
to rowdy Christmas staff nights out.

Who is the ordinary man, today's inn keeper?
the landlord who lets to migrant workers
or refugees and pregnant teenagers
knowing when to draw the line on anti-social behaviour
and the growth of petty crime
who makes make-shift homes from redundant Victorian estates.

Ordinary men, the shepherds,
working on the remote fringes of society
where weather and the fears of the dark
hold constant danger
preferring the few words required by their own company
to the constant bustle of town and market.

Ordinary men, the shepherds,
seeing visions rising with the flames of the fire
revelation in the dancing of colours across the sky
and words of angels whispering in their ears
casting caution to the wind and leaving their posting
a new-born baby requiring only smiles and few words.

Who are the ordinary men, today's shepherds?
working away at sea on oil rig or fishing fleet
where weather and the fears of the dark
hold constant danger
preferring the comradeship where little needs spoken
to the incessant noise and commercialism of bustling port.

Who are the ordinary men, today's shepherds?
posted to distant lands of strange exotic cultures
where suicide bomber or friendly peasant are hard to recognise
and winning hearts and minds takes bravery and will
seeing visions of human courage rising with the flames of fire
risking self to rescue lives from tsunamic devastation.

For it is in these ordinary men
Joseph, craftsman and refugee
inn-keeper, business man and landlord
shepherds, fishermen and soldiers
that the secret of the Christmas story lies
in the midst of angles and kings and expensive gifts
ordinary men make space and welcome
for that which is a mysterious and strange
yet one of their own.

For it is in these ordinary men
Joseph, craftsman and refugee
inn-keeper, business man and landlord

shepherds, fishermen and soldiers
that the secret of the Christmas story lies
in the midst of pressures of work and unreasonable demands
ordinary men make time the experience
the revelation of God made flesh
and living among them

For it was among ordinary men
Joseph, craftsman and refugee
inn-keeper, business man and landlord
shepherds, fishermen and soldiers
that Jesus grew up, travelled and told stories
it was among ordinary men
that Jesus was arrested and sentenced
it was among ordinary men
that Jesus was crucified and died.

And it was among ordinary men
Joseph, craftsman and refugee
inn-keeper, business man and landlord
shepherds, fishermen and soldiers
that Jesus was buried in a garden tomb
and rose among visions of angels
it was as an ordinary man that Mary mistook him as a gardener
and it was an ordinary man, Peter who ran away terrified
to scared to speak of the revelation of God rising from a tomb.

And it was among ordinary men
that Jesus took bread,
blessed it and broke it
saying "This is my body, broken for you"
among ordinary men
that Jesus took a cup of wine,
blessed it and shared it with them
saying "This is my blood poured out for you"
"Do this in memory of me."

[share bread and wine]

And so it is among us ordinary folk here
that the secret of the Christmas story lies
in the midst of dreams and politics and the consumer world
it is up to us to make space and welcome
for that which is a mysterious and strange
yet one of our own
in the midst of pressures of work and unreasonable demands
it is up to us to make time to experience
the revelation of God made flesh with us. AMEN.

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