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Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

### **Advent - The Manger is Never Far From the Cross**

#### *Bob's perspective:*

Their world was in the midst of chaos. The land of the descendants of Abraham was occupied by the Roman Empire. The people of the land were little more than slaves in their own country. Their religion and traditions were barely tolerated. Their only hope was that God had promised to send a Messiah, one who would deliver them - bringing justice and peace.

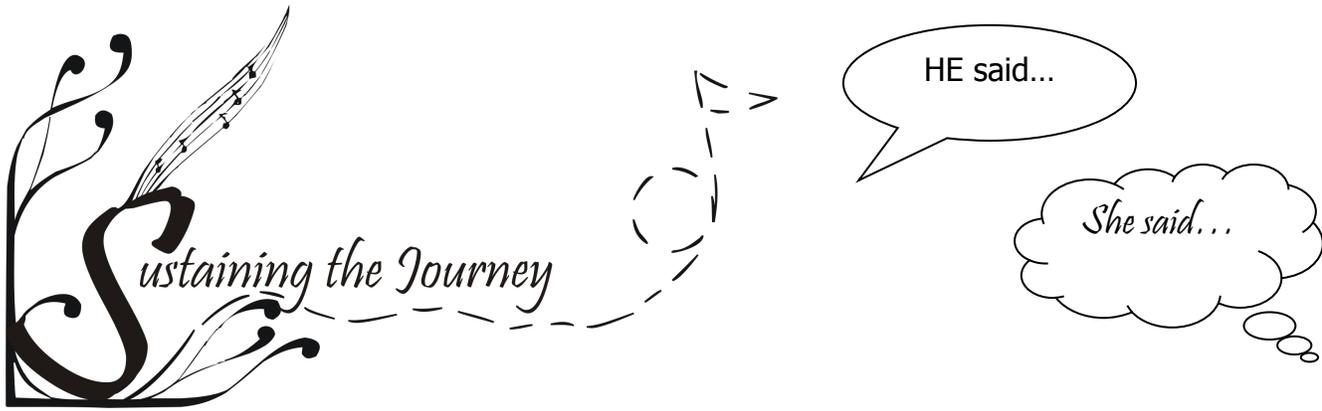
Nowadays, our Religious Freedom is again under attack. Those who don't learn from history are bound to repeat it. As Christians, we are called to re-examine what we believe and take steps to live out this faith in our daily lives. ***The Manger gives birth to our faith and the Cross challenges us to live our faith!*** Many people give very little thought to their faith until chaos is thrust into their lives. A number of years ago, just after September 11<sup>th</sup>, churches were filled with people whose lives - directly or indirectly - were thrust into chaos by the brutal terrorist attacks. However, as life normalized, many people once again disappeared. When a loved one's life is threatened by disease or injury, when livelihoods are threatened by lay-offs or downsizing, or when any chaotic event takes place in day-to-day life, people turn to God for deliverance. But as the chaos in their lives returns to order, they tend to take God for granted.

In this coming season of Advent we find ourselves in the third cycle of readings (Cycle C), which focuses on the joyful expectation of the world awaiting the Messiah. We too await the return of Jesus in the second coming. Until then, we are challenged to live out his teachings, being light for the world.

The Advent Wreath is steeped in the tradition of our ancestors who hung a large wagon wheel from the rafters of their home, decorated it with pine - a sign of hope in the cold dark world - and lit candles as a reminder that even though the earth grows darker each day, the LIGHT is coming into the world. Until then, how do we live out the mystery of who Christ is to us?

Our Church is our house of prayer. We embrace its simplicity and grandeur, standing before our Lord in a place of hopeful expectation - a place that is ready to bloom, ready to celebrate the memory of the birth of our Savior - who gave his life for us and who will return again in glory.

We listen intently to the word - our scriptural readings. They call us to live out our faith, not only in church, but in our lives and in witness to our community through the words of the Prophets, of St. Paul and especially Jesus.



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Let's resolve to take time to rediscover our faith in the mystery of Advent. Advent, a season that reconnects us with the waiting of our ancestors. Advent, a season when we reconcile with each other so Christ may be seen through us and in us. Through scripture, prayer, environment and song we will again recall God's awesome love in the Paschal Mystery - the birth, death and resurrection of his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. ***The Manger is never far from the Cross.***

*Mary's Perspective:*

***The Manger gives birth to our faith and the Cross challenges us to live our faith!***

Those words really struck me. For most of my formative years, Christmas and Easter were very separated feasts in my head. Advent had a connotation of joyful expectation, anticipation, and the beauty of new life. Lent was much more a time of introspective reflection, of dry desert times. Of course, intellectually I understood the relationship, but what I **felt** was very separated.

Bob and I have been reflecting a lot on gender differences when it comes to perspective. I wonder if this is yet more evidence - for me, the seasons of Advent and Lent aren't just about Word and events...they are imbued with sensory experiences of color and light, of incense and music. Bob absorbs scripture and prayer and environment and Mystery as part of a continuum. Maybe it's an age thing (he is reaching Yoda stage, after all...). But I digress.

In the past couple of years, I have found myself drawn to Christmas music that draws the connection between the manger and the cross. Whether Francis Patrick O'Brien's *Wood of the Cradle* or Ben Walther & Sarah Hart's *Jesus, Meek and Humble*, we sing of this Jesus who was "born in a manger, to die on a tree". No longer isolated seasons with their own identity, I have come to recognize that we need to have Advent - a time to prepare - so to celebrate fully the Nativity. We reflect on this Jesus who fished, and taught, and prayed. Jesus who came to life and became fully human so that we could share in his divinity. Throughout the "counting Sundays" of Ordinary Time, we recall teachings and miracles, struggles and times of celebration. We crave the time of Lent - again, preparation and anticipation - to consciously participate in the three-day celebration of Triduum. Our liturgical life - indeed, our human life - uses these seasons to more fully understand, appreciate, and relate to Jesus, of the manger and of the cross.

I don't know about you, but as I get older I find these seasons blow by faster. To quote a priest friend, we are often busy moving from one event to the next and it's not until a time of chaos that we take the time to reflect. Whether it's a devastating diagnosis or the death of a loved one, a job loss or birth of a baby, sometimes it takes those moments to shake us out of our routine and focus on what really matters. Advent provides an opportunity to focus - to immerse in the sensory experience and to recognize our connection to our ancestors in faith. It is an opportunity to realize that the manger gives birth to our faith, and the Cross challenges us to live it.

Don't let this time blow by!