

This is Not for Spectators

Luke 2:1-20

There is nothing like seeing the Christmas story unfold before us. Sure, we can read it in the Bible or we can watch it on screens but there is something about real people living into the story, if even only for a few minutes. Of course, there are limitations but only to our imaginations. But there is excitement and nervousness, and surprise and unpredictability not unlike that very first Christmas. Experiencing the Christmas story in this way breathes new life into it. It may not have looked exactly like this but neither did it look like a Hallmark Christmas card: serene and draped in velvet, not one strand of Mary's hair astray. Because, the Christmas story is not a portrait where the subjects stood motionless. It is live action. The characters; Elizabeth and Zechariah and baby John, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the angel, the wise men; they are not spectators watching what is happening from the sidelines. They are participants in the story. Even more; they are fully engaged; they are all in. They are praying, serving, hurrying, exclaiming, praising, prophesying, travelling, giving birth, rushing, keeping watch, glorifying, telling, journeying, worshipping. There are no spectators to the nativity.

Some of you may have heard me tell this story before. I was 4 and watching my mum and older brother, Ian, playing badminton in our yard. And of course it looked so fun that I wanted to play too. So I asked nicely (at least that's how I remember it) if I could play, and then I asked again and again and again, each time with a little more angst and urgency. And after asking, pleading, begging several times, my mum told me that I could play a very important role: I was so excited I could hardly contain myself. So I asked what it was and she said that I could be a spectator. A spectator? I was jumping up and down, shouting with joy: "I'm going to be a spectator! I'm going to be a spectator!" And then, and then I asked "what's a spectator?" And in a split second my excitement level went down, way down, like a deflated balloon. No one wants to be a spectator.

No one wants to be a spectator in life – not really. I understand that some of us, myself included, prefer to sit on the sidelines, wallflowers afraid of embarrassing ourselves or being picked last or even worse, not picked at all. We are self-conscious. It just feels safer outside of the spotlight. Maybe others of us choose to stand back: we aren't born spectators but we get tired or frustrated or uncomfortable and stand back because we think someone else should handle it, or that it's not our business or our responsibility, or we say that we don't want to step on anyone's toes or just we don't like that way something is done. And it's one of Newton's laws of physics: an object in motion stays in motion and an object at rest stays at rest. Once we stop or stand back for awhile, it's definitely harder to get going again. But no one really likes to be left out of the action.

There are no spectators to the nativity. There are no voyeurs: no one just watching. There are no bleachers or seats where people can munch on popcorn while watching the story unfold before them. No one is standing still. No one, not one person who witnesses the events of that first Christmas is described as sitting around. Nor do

they ever say, they don't have time. In fact, each leaves what they were doing to participate in the story as it unfolds around them. There is an urgency to participate in this story, an urgency to participate in the coming of God's kingdom. Elizabeth and Zechariah experience the urgency: they are old and barren and time is running out or has run out for them to have a child. Mary and Joseph feel the urgency: Mary is expecting any day when they have to travel to Bethlehem for the census and she goes into labour before they have a hotel reservation. The shepherds feel the urgency: after hearing the news from the angels the scriptures say they hurried to Bethlehem to see what had happened, without a word of what happened to the sheep! And the wise men, they knew that this coming kingdom was so urgent that they were looking for the star before it was even there in the sky. There was an urgency to participate.

Do you feel that urgency? Only 7 more days until Christmas. The stores create a sense of urgency. But do you still feel the urgency, the excitement of the story? You know, Give More Sunday is really about being a participant, not a spectator. Its about getting involved in the story, its about getting involved in the coming of the Kingdom of God. Its about getting up off the sidelines and being part of a team, about giving up your comfortable seats in the auditorium and getting on the stage where the action is, its about taking your place, not resting on your laurels or waiting for someone else to do it, not taking a pass and saying you will do it next time, not letting fear or anxiety or insecurity prevent us being a part. Its about taking a risk, stepping outside your comfort zone, dropping your guard, challenging yourself, giving more of yourself than you can personally afford and I'm not talking about finances, giving more of yourself than you thought possible because the kingdom of God has come to us in Jesus.