

Easter Reflection 2020

The prophet Isaiah proclaims "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel". Centuries later Mary is immaculately conceived, and later Christ is Incarnate as she and Joseph's son. There are nature miracles, healing miracles, resurrection miracles, exorcisms. Wonderful sermons and parables are heard by many, and all of these wondrous words and deeds serve as the preamble to the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord. The Ascension and Pentecost serve as a final curtain call for this amazing drama, and when one ponders what on earth happened, there is only one clear and succinct answer, God Happened.

At a moment in history, in an insignificant backwater of the Roman Empire, a woman conceived a child, a virgin gave birth to a son. If this son had brothers and sisters, he was the elder, if they were his cousins, he was still the elder. If his father died when he was 19, then this son would assume responsibility for his family. He would care for his mother, ensure that his brothers or cousins were gainfully employed, and he would have arranged marriages for his sisters. Mary had Jesus all to herself for the first 30 years of his life, and then she let him go on his own journey, the way of the cross. Mary gave her son to history, to the cross, and to you and I, truly the gift that keeps on giving.

The life that led to the cross was one of comfort and healing, a life spent with the poor, the outcast and the afflicted; ultimately it was a life that questioned and challenged authority. To question and challenge authority during Jesus' time often ended with the cross as both punishment and warning. Few then saw the cross as the means of repentance and deliverance; there is a cruel beauty present in the cross. The risen Lord is experienced by Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna. In John Mary Magdalene enters the tomb after Peter and the beloved disciple; the gospel remarks that the burial clothes were folded; in my telling of the story Mary arrived first and folded the burial clothes of her Lord and Rabbi who she initially confuses with a gardener. "Mary" a voice that she knew so well speaks her name; "Rabbi" responds Mary to the only teacher that ever mattered to her. What exactly happened to the women, and later the disciples, and ultimately the Church? God Happened.

Mary had Jesus to herself for 30 years before she gave him over to us, and we have him the entirety of our lives. I like to think of the passage of time that encompasses 33 years, and compare it to the brevity of time with which we celebrate the liturgical year. The 33 years are a novel, the liturgical year a short story. The infant that is born in December is crucified and risen by the close of April; I sometimes see the child on the cross, and am reminded of Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*. I am also informed by the traditional story of *The Three Trees*. Three trees growing on the top of a mountain aspire to glory. The first tree wants to be harvested to make a wonderful chest to hold the world's treasures; the second tree wants to be harvested to make a magnificent ship to sail the seas, and the third tree simply desires to stay on the mountain and give glory to God. The first tree is cut and becomes not a magnificent chest, but a box with which to hold animal feed, and the second tree is cut and becomes not a wonderful ship but a small rowboat. The third tree is simply cut and thrown onto a pile of planks. The feed box became the manger, and the rowboat held Jesus and the disciples as Jesus calms the storm. The third tree? That tree became the cross-beam upon which Christ was crucified, forever giving glory to the risen Lord. What happened? God happened!