



When I was teaching, I used to talk about how important POV is to my literature students. It is always good to look at a story though

another character's eyes from their POV. For example, we all know the components of *Jack and the Bean Stalk*. Jack is usually held up as the hero of the story. He ultimately saves his mother from poverty after planting the magic beans to grow a beanstalk, climb it and find riches. He finds the hen that lays the golden eggs and other valuables that allow Jack and his mother to live, as they say, "happily ever after."

However, if you look at the story from the giants perspective, Jack is anything but a hero. After all, uninvited, he physically breaks into the giant's castle and steals the giant's rightful property before fleeing back down the beanstalk. The giant pursues him to

recover his property and Jack cuts down the beanstalk; the giant falls and is killed. So, what does that make Jack? I will leave that up to you. But - POV does change perspective.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we have Matthew telling the story with Joseph at the center not Mary. If we look at the story from Joseph's point of view, we can see why he is so troubled. While Mary's account looks at the angelic, spiritual visitation, Joseph focuses on the legal issue of an unmarried woman in trouble. At first, he sees a cheating fiance who is with a child that obviously is not his. What else could he assume. He is a realist. He comes from a world where virgins do not get pregnant. His world had collapsed, fallen in. All is lost. Mary, the love of his life, is not who he thought she was. But with God – it is never how is seems. Let me illustrate my point.

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion's guest room. Instead, the angels were given

a small space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, "Things aren't always what they seem."

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very welcoming and generous farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food, they had the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest.

When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, "How could you have let this happen? The first man had everything, yet you helped him. The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die."

"Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied.

"When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there

was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it."

"Then last night as we slept in the farmers bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave him the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem."

This story reflects the Gospel; how could this be, Joseph ponders? But the voice in the dream would not be quiet: "For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her," his dream insisted. It went against all that is logical and reasonable, but things are not always as they seem.

How would you react? Would you recognize the message? But this is what Joseph was asked to consider, the seriousness and the absurdity of the dream.

We also hear: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means "God is

with us." The "with us" phrase should bring comfort especially in the turbulent times in which we live. Everyday it seems something is reported that brings more unease. No matter what it is, "God is with us."

We find comfort in others because they too go "with us" into the good times and the sad times. We ask them to go with us "to the doctor's, to the hospital, through the rest of our lives together."

They do this because they love us. It is the same with God. He is with us in our stumbling and shortcomings, in triumphs and in our thanksgiving, in the midst of the messiness of our lives and the days we seem to barely hold it together. He is there.

"When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home." Because he knew things aren't always what they seem, and he knew God was with him. That is the promise of Christmas.