

For many, Christmas is a cozy setting with family at the center. We've cast that image onto the Holy Family, father and mother doting upon the Christ Child, who smiles lovingly upon them. The events we recall this night might as well be in a sterile snow globe.

Christmas should be about children dressed as angels and shepherds and sheep. It should a perfect picture of a happy family next to happy cattle, a happy camel, and a gold-bearing wise man, or maybe three. The Christmas story should be told in the manner of Linus Van Pelt, who recites the tale from the King James Version of the Gospel of Luke while illuminated from above.

Peace on earth should swirl about like artificial snow over the stable. Oh, to go to our long winter's nap imagining Mary rocking Baby Jesus and singing him a lullaby. The last thing we want is to disturb this peaceful image of peace on earth, good will to men.

In reality, this is a night that rocked the world.

This is the night when a couple, engaged to be married – the wife carrying a child who was not her intended's – were forced to travel 90 miles through desert, forest, both rife with thieves. At best, they would have traveled 10 miles a day, given that Mary was nine months along. Donkey, or no, the journey must have been torturous.

This is the night, when, due to Caesar's decree, the house and lineage of David crowded into Bethlehem for the despised taxation census. There was no room anywhere – even with relatives that would most likely have been in town.

This is the night when our travelers settled in to a cave where animals were being kept. And, then, her waters broke.

It's unlikely that Joseph would have known what to do. He was a carpenter, not a doctor. He probably left her alone in the cave with the donkeys and sheep to find a midwife. Eventually, Mary gives birth without benefit of anesthetic and in a nest of contagion. Silent night, it was not.

Jesus' mother wraps him in a blanket full of the dust of the road and places him in a trough where the animals usually find their food.

It was far from an auspicious beginning. Forget being the mother of the savior of the world. Right now, what is desired is warm, clean clothing; hot food; and a comfortable place to rest from the ordeal. Mary is exhausted. Joseph is in shock.

Baby Jesus, well, he probably needs new straw and a nap before nursing. Then these filthy shepherds show up, telling a story that is bizarre at best. What on earth is going on?

Please, we want our snow globe back!

But, it's important to remember that the birth of Jesus occurred in much the same way many children are born into poverty. Mothers, young and not so young, giving birth on dirt floors with little to keep them both warm and fed. Let's open our hearts to see Jesus in every child who is brought into this world and not just in the ones born in first-world hospitals or by trained midwives and doulas.

The greed of new generations of Caesars force people, including children, to leave their homes all over the world. Today they flee for their lives because of war and poverty and violence. They flee countries like Syria, or Honduras, or Guatemala. They flee hurricane-ravaged coastlines and burned-out communities. They flee domestic violence, addiction, and crime-ridden neighborhoods. Some find room in tent cities, some families are separated at borders, some are turned away, some don't make it at all. Those families seek shelter, food, and safety, just like our friends Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus.

If we claim to be Christians, we must see the Holy Family in all persons seeking refuge from war, famine, and poverty. If we wish to rock Jesus and sing him a lullaby, we must find it in our hearts to embrace marginalized people across the world and across the street.

Christian tradition teaches that the Word, the essence and idea of God, became flesh and “pitched his tent” to live among us, in order that we could experience divinity in the midst of humanity.

Mary's baby will grow into a man who so embodied the Creator's love that those around him found themselves deeply healed, deeply loved, deeply changed.

The challenge of Christmas is to remember the story of Christ's humble birth and allow his humility to inspire our own, so that we, emboldened by the Holy Spirit, might be healers, lovers, and change agents in the environments in which we find ourselves.

There is no snow globe, there is only **our** globe and all the inhabitants therein.

Each and everyone one of them are made in God's image. We are to seek the Christ in all of them.

Go to Bethlehem and see the newborn King.

Rejoice this night. Sing with and like the angels.

Tomorrow and going forward:

work for peace on earth and

be of good will to all people.

Do your best to love, it helps you keep Christmas all year long.