

A journal for restless minds

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

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That pregnant pause

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What child is this?

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

A Christmas Miracle

Life in the small

Life comes in sizes large and small and yet, measured against the enormity and vastness of the universe, all life is infinitesimally minute.

Size matters not, for what distinguishes life from inorganic matter is the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death. Thus the tiniest unicellular organism may be legitimately categorized as life, just as much as blue whales and giant redwood trees. The human species is neither among the smallest nor the largest of living things; on a scale from the smallest to the largest, man is a closer kin to the small. What differentiates and distinguishes man from all other life is the soul, unique to man.

All the argument for when life begins ignores this simple fact: living organisms exist which exemplify life in the small; so small it remains invisible to the naked eye. Life in the main, of course, is never the primary praxis of the argument, rather it is conjured up using the assumptive predicate of value; the value of a life illogically determined, not by the

life in utero, but arbitrarily by the subjective, self-serving desires of another.

Nestled inside the Luxor Hotel and Casino in Sin City (Las Vegas, NV) is a fascinating educational experience: *Bodies: The Exhibition* which showcases 13 whole-body specimens and over 260 organs and partial body specimens. It is truly a marvelous educational experience and well worth the time to visit.



What most caught my eye was toward the end of the exhibit and it took my breath away.

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One Miracle In Time

That pregnant pause

We are all familiar with the name *Emmanuel* which literally means "God is with us": "*Immanu`el*" (עִמָּנוּאֵל). Yet, no one, in all likelihood, is familiar with a slightly different phrase: "*Hashem hu betocheinu*" (בתוכינו.תוכינו) which is Hebrew for "God is in us." And yet, God is both *with us* and *in us*, isn't he?

We heard in the second reading that it is our responsibility to live lives that reflect the glory we have received through Jesus Christ; that our lives should be a doxology—a prayerful response to the experience of God in our lives—that we should live our lives glorifying God in us, "*Hashem hu betocheinu*".

How much do you and I listen to the voice of God within our hearts? Do our words and actions honestly reflect our deep love and affection for the "*Immanu`el*" and "*Hashem hu betocheinu*"?

In the first reading, David was concerned that God only had a tent in which to dwell, while he lived in luxury, in a palace built of cedar and stone. David thought to make it his responsibility to take care of God, to provide him with a more fitting dwelling place. And God laughed at him, "*Why should you build a house for me? It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I*

have destroyed all your enemies before you."

It was foolish of David to feel it was his responsibility to care for God. God wants our love, but he does not need our protection. Without our help, God is still Lord of heaven and earth.

So, where is the proper place for God to dwell? The pre-infancy narrative in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke provides us with an important clue.



We have heard this many times before: "*The angel Gabriel was sent from God, to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.*"

"Mary is told by the angel Gabriel, the messenger of God, that the Lord is with her. Much more intimate than God's presence to David, the Lord is literally with

*her. She is the dwelling place. She is the new ark, beyond all our reasonable expectations. She is tent and temple. God is literally, physically in her, conceived as human, her very flesh, great with dignity, by the power of the Most High. And she is the temple. She is the greater house, the promise to David."*¹

The twelfth century monk, theologian, and philosopher, Blessed Isaac of Stella once wrote that:

"In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God's Word, a mother of Christ, His daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful. These words are used in a universal sense of the church, in a special sense of Mary, in a particular sense of the individual Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the church's faith."

Of Mary, there can be no argument: she was the first person who could say of Jesus, "*This is my body, this is my blood.*" She was the first altar of the Incarnate Word; her body a fitting temple, a pure and unblemished tabernacle for the Lord.

As the father of two daughters and the grandfather of three granddaughters, from personal experience I will readily admit to a certain bias. Little girls are wonderful; pretty, flirtatious, innocent, and so hard to refuse anything. As the song goes, "*Thank heaven for little girls. Thank heaven for them all. No matter where, no matter who;*

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For without them, what would little boys do?"². "God borrows from many creatures to make a little girl—He uses the song of a bird, the squeal of a pig, the antics of a monkey, the spryness of a grasshopper, the curiosity of a cat, the slyness of a fox, and the softness of a kitten." How can anyone fail to be enchanted by their smile!

Mary was a young girl when the angel appeared to her, just as my daughters were once and my granddaughters are now. One moment she was a young girl, all sugar and spice and everything nice, sitting on her bed dreaming little girl dreams and then in the next she is asked to be the mother of the Son of God. Her reaction when Gabriel told her she was to be the mother of God confounds and confuses us.

As a young unwed Jewish girl she should have been terrified, afraid of what this would mean for her, her family, her future husband—it would literally turn her life on its head; it most certainly would be terribly embarrassing and shameful; friends and others who knew her would point fingers and talk about her behind her back. But, instead of reacting with fear she calmly responded "May it be done to me according to your word." This young girl, suddenly thrust into womanhood, is asked if she would be willing to carry God in her body and in an incredible act of faith, says, "Yes."

Throughout her life Mary responded with a peaceful acceptance to God's will. Luke writes that at the birth of Jesus, "Mary kept all of these things, pondering them in her heart."

Throughout her life she was completely at peace because she trusted in God.

Mary's life was completely changed by the conception and birth of her son. How overwhelming this must have been for her; the future must have seemed incredibly distressing. But even in the uneasiness and confusion of that time, she was completely at peace; filled with faith and trust in God.

We should ask ourselves how Mary could have possibly been so calm in such a chaotic and desperate time. I'm sure part of it was her personality, but certainly the presence of God within her, so deep that she produced God's only son, had to have provided her with certain calmness. Life is never free from danger and difficulties, but as Mary watched her newborn son, she must have sensed God's love and presence and that must have brought her great peace and joy.

We should try to always emulate Mary, who when she heard the news from the shepherds, turned inward and kept her thoughts between herself and God. We can only imagine how she must have felt, what she must have thought. To be chosen by God to bear His son, the Savior of the world; to hear her son called the Messiah, the anointed one — *Immanu`el*", "God is with us" — all this must have caused her great anxiety and concern.

Is there anyone who hasn't struggled with doubt, and perhaps fear, when trying to discern what God has in store for us? Is it so difficult to believe he has something special planned

for each of us, that we each have an important part to play in his plan?

The Holy Spirit filled Mary with peace and gave her the courage to become the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. In a similar way, each of us has received the gifts of the Holy Spirit; we have been blessed with His presence and love; we have been filled with the peace and the courage to faithfully accept her son's saving graces.

Just as Mary reordered her life so that God could grow in her, we are called to make room for God in our lives. Just as a pregnant mother waits for labor while at the same time fully experiencing the reality of the new life within her waiting to be born, so too should we be experiencing the reality of God's presence within us, waiting to be born.

We all claim to have faith, but are we willing to act on that faith; for most of us that is the problem. When asked, Mary said "Yes," trusting in the Lord. By her "Yes" she taught us that "God is with us," "Immanu`el" and that "God is in us," "Hashem hu betocheinu" waiting for us to say "Yes!"

Christ be with you. Christ be in you. God bless you. Amen.

Homily for the
Fourth Sunday of Advent (B)
2 Sm 7:1-5, 8B-12, 14A, 16
Rom 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

1. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *This Is My Body*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.
2. Alan Jay Lerner & Frederick Loewe, "Thank Heaven for Little Girls", opening and closing song for the 1958 film, *Gigi*, 1957.

The room had a single full-body cadaver (all bodies had been preserved with the skin removed,) this particular specimen was female, with the abdomen and womb cut open in order to show the fetus *in utero*. But it was two displays, one in the center of the room and the other against a wall which held my attention.

The first held seven clear blocks of plastic, each with a fetus ranging from 2 weeks up to 8 weeks gestation. The second display was similar with fetuses from 10 weeks up to 30 weeks gestation. Proof of human life in the small for anyone to see. Even the smallest, at a brief 2 weeks was clearly and unmistakably human. This was absolutely no mere indistinguishable mass of tissue but had at one time been a living human being, with a rapidly developing body and a fully developed soul.

On one of the walls was a placard stating that the ovum, the female reproductive cell, was the largest cell in the human body, about the size of a grain of sand, and visible to the naked eye. The male sperm cell on the other hand is the smallest, about sixteen times smaller than the ovum.

The salient point here is that both ovum and sperm are unicellular life on their own merit; though admittedly, human life requires their fusion in order to form a diploid cell, called a zygote. Once a zygote is formed, it is literally off to the races, with the zygote going through its first cell division within 24 to 30 hours.

The miracle of life should serve to remind us of the awesome power of Almighty God. This Christmas, let us remember the miracles of birth which we celebrate: the son born to an aging woman who had been called barren and the Christ-child born to a virgin, who had had no relations with a man. For, as the angel Gabriel said, "*nothing will be impossible for God.*"

A Bed Fit For A King

What child is this?

On a cold, wintery night many years ago, a young woman, of an age but a few years beyond childhood, sat quietly astride a small donkey as it was led by a solitary man traveling an empty trail. It was a common enough sight in those days as many were traveling reluctantly to faraway places by the orders of those who harshly ruled this desolate land.

In truth, it was not a particularly good time for the young woman to be traveling, especially on such uncomfortable and crude transportation, for she was in her final month and the pains that would accompany the birth of her child would soon be upon her. Her husband worried that her time would come before they arrived at their destination but he dared not hurry the animal along for fear that this might cause the woman to give birth before her time.

As they approached their destination, the man stopped for a moment and asked a passerby where they might find a place to rest for the night, only to be told that every room had been taken and nothing remained

available. Nearby, on the edge of the village, he spied a poor, ramshackle structure within which he found a few goats, an aging cow, and some chickens. Although it provided small protection from the wind and the cold, there was sufficient straw to fashion a crude bed for the exhausted couple to lay their heads.

That night the young woman gave birth to a newborn son and wrapped him in the only thing available, the blanket from the donkey's back that she had sat on during their journey. When her infant had been fed and seemed content, she placed him in a manger, a small rustic wooden trough, built to feed the animals that were stabled there. All the while, the couple watched over this new life before them with joy in their hearts and smiles on their lips knowing that while they had little to offer the child, they understood that they had just received the greatest gift of all.

Given the bleak circumstances, the miserable accommodations, the times and conditions, no one would have given any chance at all for that newborn child. The fact that the boy lived at all was no small miracle. The fact that the mother also lived was another miracle. And yet, miracles though they surely were, they mattered little when considered against the larger questions of who he was and why he was born.

Of the man little is known with absolute certainty beyond the name of Joseph, and of his steadfast devotion to protecting his young wife and her child, of whom he was not the father.

He was most likely an itinerant artisan or carpenter, although of what can only be conjectured. We neither know when nor where he was born with any degree of certitude, nor have records of the time, place, and manner of his death ever been produced or discovered. Some have suggested that he was a young man while most believe he was an elderly widower who, with the roll of the dice, it was decided would marry the young woman and care for her. All we know of him is that he was a man of faith who went to great lengths to protect and care for his wife and child.



The child's mother, whose name was Mary, called him Jesus which was the name she claimed was told to her by an angel. This infant so poorly born and unannounced to the world would soon become known by many names and titles, chief among them rabbi, master, Lord, Emmanuel, the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of Man, the King of kings, and the Son of God the Most High. We have also come to know him as The Word, best described by John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Many find great difficulty in believing that the Possessor and Creator of all that was, is, and ever shall be would choose to slip quietly into this

world with neither wealth nor fame nor power or that He would purposefully choose to be born into a family of no remark who lived in a small village of perhaps no more than a few hundred inhabitants in an insignificant, backwater country, a place few neither knew nor cared not at all to know.

Of such lore legends are born, history is made, lives are lost, souls are saved, and the story of man forever altered.



May the blessings of Almighty God descend upon you and remain with you this year and all the years yet to come.

Wishing you a blessed
Christmas



May the love & peace of
Christ be with you always,

Deacon Chuck

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

On Conscience

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press

2007, 82 pages.

Society and Sanity

Frank Sheed

Sheed & Ward, New York

1953, 270 pages.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Charles J. Chaput

Henry Holt and Co.

February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life

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Ten Issues per year.

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

www.touchstonemag.com

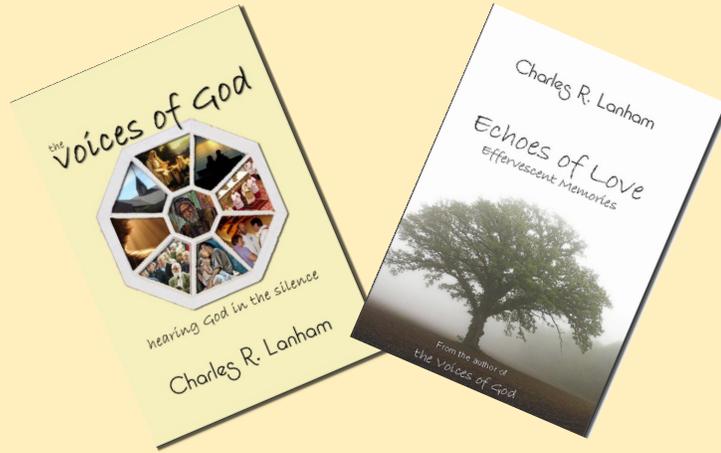
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

www.catholic.com



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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