

As we approach the end of this old year, 2017
And move toward a new year 2018
We pause at the manger once more.

Here we take time to look at Mary.

She was probably a young girl-
No older than 15 or so
When the angel came and told her
that she was pregnant with the Messiah,
God's chosen.

This baby was God in human flesh,
As John's gospel tells us
Full of grace and truth.

But carrying the Savior of the world
Around in her belly for nine months
And then giving birth to a divine Child
bearing Jesus,
was no picnic.

In fact,
I would say that her life was made more difficult
By this unsought,
Unmerited,
And inexplicable
blessing.

She was in danger of being rejected
By society
For being an unwed mother.

Joseph could've sent her away
In shame and disgrace.
But he did not.

Also,
the pictures we have of Mary
In our mind
As the lowly Virgin
sweet,
beautiful
and happily
cradling the Child in her arms
are at best incomplete.

For I suspect that

she gave birth in the usual way
With cries, and pain
and wild incontrollable contractions.

Her hair was likely plastered to her head
And a drowsy sleep closed her eyes
After her heavy labor.

This may not be as romantic a Christmas scene,
As we get on Christmas cards
Or here at the Manger.
But it is far more realistic
And true to the way God works in our lives.

Approaching the birth of Christ through Mary
Allows us to acknowledge
That pain and suffering
Are part of our lives.

And that's ok-
Because God is still with us-
As Jesus' names implies-
Immanuel-
God with us.

God being with us doesn't change our circumstances
And make everything calm and bright.

God being with us
Changes US.

We cant always control our outward circumstances
And makle them all better.

But we can bear God in our soul
As Mary did so long ago
And so far away in Bethlehem.

This truth came home to me
When I was doing post Graduate Study at the University of Notre Dame-

An entire campus dedicated to the Blessed virgin Mary.
Along with a beautiful chapel.

I also strongly suspected they had a chapel dedicated
To Lou Holtz-
But I never found it during my four years there.

I still remember how that first Christmas after my divorce had begun
 I Made my way to the Mary Chapel
 At the back of the Campus Church.

Surrounded by poinsettias and bright lights
 There stood the creche with its life-size Holy Family.

And I poured out my aching heart to that lowly Virgin.
 And it was enough.

She said,
 "I know. I understand.
 And so does my Son Who died for you."

As we end 2017
 A year of great joy and in some ways equal sorrow
 For many,
 Let us kneel in our hearts
 And ask for the blessing
 And the deep faith of this most Blessed One.

(play "Mary Did you Know?")

Lyrics:

Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
 Mary did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
 Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
 This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you

Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
 Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?
 Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
 And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God

Mary did you know, Mary did you know, Mary did you know
 The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the dead will live again
 The lame...
 The blind will see, the deaf will hear and the dead will live again
 The lame will leap, the dumb will speak, the praises of the lamb.

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
 Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?
 Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
 This sleeping child you're holding is the great I am.
 Mary did you know, Mary did you know, Mary did you know?

Amen.