

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.