

# Nativity Reflection

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## #1 – Darkness

Nothing about the experience of complete darkness is comfortable. You stumble, trip, don't know where you are, don't know where you are going, you can't see others, they can't see you – darkness speaks of danger and threat. In our society we go to great lengths to avoid darkness – light bulbs, flashlights, nightlights, headlights, and every other kind of artificial light you can imagine. Can you imagine the chaos that would happen if there was a blackout at any one of the malls right now? We are dependant on light to function – so what happens when an entire people have chosen darkness over light?

Israel, God's chosen people, had become a people walking in darkness. Time and time again they rejected the covenants with God, choosing instead to distance themselves from God and remain in steeped in the darkness of selfishness and sin. They had forgotten the God of their fathers and had chosen darkness. At the time of Christ's birth, we were in desperate need of God's light to redirect and restore us.

And that light did come; over 2000 years ago the light of the world took on human flesh and dwelt among us. Born in the middle of the night, God came to bring us his light and salvation. In the form of a helpless baby, hope was restored and we no longer were chained to the darkness we had created.

Then why are we still held captive by the darkness of sin? So much of our lives and our culture do not reflect the light that came into the world on Christmas. Rather it reflects the darkness of our selfishness, hatred, violence, despair, and anger. The story of Christ's birth becomes just that – a story – far removed from our everyday reality.

Just as our eyes slowly grow accustomed to the darkness, we have grown to tolerate and accept the darkness as normal. We become comfortable and complacent about the darkness because it hides our flaws and sins. We wander aimlessly and wonder why we aren't getting anywhere. We have forgotten that this is not how we are called to live – Christ was born so that we could become children of the light and no longer hide in the shadows.

Right now – in this darkened place – we are in desperate need of Christ's light. The story of Christ's birth is a story of God's brilliant light shattering our darkness. Tonight as we reflect on the nativity, we ask that it be more than a story. Jesus, light from true light, we pray that you destroy the darkness of sin that holds us captive... whatever that keeps us separated from you... whatever wound or sin or doubt or fear... Come Lord Jesus and may we be exposed, healed, and restored by your light.

## **#2 – Shepherds and Magi**

The arrival of our Savior, the light of the world, was not greeted with trumpets and fanfare – no red carpet or parade – just a star above the humble stable where Christ was born.

The shepherds didn't even see the new star, but their night watch was interrupted by an angel bearing news of a savior, messiah, and king. Of all the men who needed to know of this great event, why were these men first? These men were considered to be the scum of society – violent thieves with no respect for the Law. And yet to them the whole host of heaven appeared proclaiming the good news and glorifying God.

The dim light of the star above the stable was not unnoticed by all. Wise men, Magi, from the East recognized the sign and immediately set out to greet the new king.

Though unlikely witnesses to the birth of the Messiah, both the shepherds and the Magi were open to seeing the signs and more importantly they were willing to take a risk and follow the signs to Christ. They could have ignored the angel, the star and stayed safe doing what they had always done. Yet instead they allowed God to break into their normal lives and it led them straight to Christ. When they reached the infant king, they fell down in worship, astonishment, and awe at what they were privileged to witness.

How often does God use the smaller lights of family, friends, events, and circumstances to lead us to his light? How is God trying to break through your darkness right now? For each of us, God is setting up stars to lead us back to him. All too often fear keeps us from following where that star may lead – fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of sacrifice. And the times that we do encounter Christ (in mass, prayer, etc.), what is our response? Do we freely worship?

Light of the world, open our eyes and hearts to the ways in which you are breaking through our darkness – come and lead us closer to you that we too might worship and adore.

### **#3 – Joseph**

What do we know of the first man to hold the Son of God? Although the foster father of Jesus is hardly mentioned in the Gospels, the importance of his role is undeniable. We do know that Joseph is a humble man, a man of trade, a righteous, upright and devout man, the devoted husband of Mary – Joseph is a man after God's own heart.

In that dark, still night as Joseph looked at his wife holding their newborn son that was not his, he must have thought back over the events that led him to this place. His fiancée becomes pregnant; there is talk of a quiet divorce, and then a dream, an angel, and a message that this child is the Messiah who will save the people from their sins, then the census and the journey to Bethlehem - all leading to this moment in a stable. He listened in wonder as the shepherd told of the angels who proclaimed and praised the birth of his son. How could this be? After all, he was just an ordinary man.

Indeed Joseph was a simple man, but his response to the angel's message makes him anything but ordinary. Without fully understanding the plan, Joseph faithfully accepts God's role for him (a role God had been preparing for him from the beginning of time). His obedience and trust allows him to take Mary as his wife and become the provider and protector of the Mother of God and God's only Son. With humble acceptance and a heroic response, Joseph steps into his role within salvation history. He is faithful, no matter the cost or sacrifice. And in this stable, he quietly praises God's faithfulness as he holds the fulfillment of God's promise.

We, like Joseph, have a role to play in salvation history. But all too often we quickly discount our ability and potential. We see our lives as too small, too ordinary, too sinful to be used in God's plan. But God, ignoring all our excuses, calls us into his light and into his plan. What is your role? Have you faithfully discerned your call, your vocation? What is your response going to be?

Lord, light of the world, come and grant us the humble trust of St. Joseph. May we see and accept the role you have prepared for us and may our lives bear witness to your faithfulness.

## #4 – Mary

A new mother holds her newborn son gazing in love and awe at his perfect tiny body. This scene has been repeated countless times through history – yet this one is different. This young mother has just given birth to the promise of the prophets, the hope of all creation, the savior of humanity, the light of the world.

It is through the yes of this young mother, Mary, that God became man so that man might become God. She is theotokos – God bearer. Her fiat (yes) is said in complete trust, humility and surrender. In order to bear Christ for the world, she offers her life and her body to the service of God. And in that yes, she becomes the vessel through which God brings his light into a darkened world. But her submission and surrender did not stop with the Annunciation; Mary continues to say yes to God's will at every turn – all the way to the cross. As God-bearer – she holds nothing back, becoming not only the mother of God, but a mother to us as well.

We too are called to be theotokos – God-bearer. God calls us to bear His light into our lives where sin and shame dwell. We are called to bear his forgiveness in our families and broken relationships. He calls us to bear his truth in a society that is deluded by lies. This call to make Christ real and present does not come without pain – yet like a woman in labor, the pain is overshadowed by the joy it brings. What are the areas of our lives that most desperately need the presence of Christ? How can we make his presence real in those areas?

Light of the world, help us to make your presence a reality in every aspect of our lives. Give us the trust and faith of your holy mother.

Holy Mary; Holy Mother of God; Mother of our Creator; Mother of our Savior; Virgin most powerful; Virgin most merciful; Virgin most faithful; Seat of wisdom; Spiritual vessel; Vessel of honor; Mystical rose; Tower of David; Tower of ivory; House of gold; Ark of the covenant; Gate of heaven; Morning star; Health of the sick; Refuge of sinners; Comforter of the afflicted; Help of Christians; Theotokos; God Bearer

– we seek your protection and intercession this night – may we love your Son as you do.

## #5 – Christ

Isaiah 9:1 The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom  
a light has shone.  
For a child is born to us, a son is given us;  
upon his shoulder dominion rests.  
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero,  
Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh \*  
and made his dwelling among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
the glory as of the Father's only Son,  
full of grace and truth

Christ, Son of God, light of the world – you humbled yourself and took on flesh so that we might no longer stumble in darkness, but rather see your glory and claim your inheritance as royal sons and daughters of God.

2000 years ago you were born in a humble stable with Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds as the only witnesses. You shattered the darkness that we had created out of love for your creation. Today we celebrate and thank you for that amazing gift.

Tonight, once again, we need your light to shatter our darkness. Come Lord and be born within our hearts. Remove the darkness of sin, hurt, anger, doubt, and fear. Bring us the freedom that can only come by living in your light. We invite you in Lord – we give you permission to expose our failings and weaknesses with your light. We ask for your healing and restoration. Give us hearts ready and willing to worship and adore you.

“We fall down in adoration before the Son of God. We unite ourselves in spirit to the wonder of Mary and Joseph. As we adore Christ, born in a stable, we make our own the faith, filled with astonishment, of the shepherds of that time; we feel their same amazement and their same joy.

At the feet of the Word Incarnate let us place our joys and fears, our tears and hopes. Only in Christ, the new man, is true light shed upon the mystery of human existence. “ JPII, 1999