

## **Christmas Eve: 24 December 2021**

I image it this way: The night is well advanced; even the late crowd at the corner tavern has finally stumbled home. Most people are asleep: some with troubled tossing; some dreaming. The insomniacs are awake with pre-occupations, the sick hope for relief, animals doze. The starlit night is still and secret, like millions before and thousands since.

There is a cry: A newborn baby's cry. The cry of a newborn child cannot be absorbed by straw and animal bodies, it is too new and insistent, too piercing and raw.

Did anyone hear the cry so long ago? Perhaps some did: maybe insomniacs and light sleepers; perhaps mothers with their own newborns, and mothers who treasure the memory of their newborns-now-grown. I suppose some men could have heard it: the tenderhearted, those alert for any strange sound. Maybe a criminal or two heard the cry, fearful of police or enemies.

Even if some heard, most would not have thought much of it. Another baby born, another mouth to feed for some hard-pressed family. One more little Jewish kid born under the heel of Rome. Most probably went right on sleeping or rolled over and went back to sleep.

Do you want to hear the cry of the newborn? Think before you decide. If you open your ears to hear the newborn's cry from the manger, you will hear another cry, too. You will hear the cry from the cross. The first cry prefigures the last; the last cry fulfills the first. At both, we receive new life through the One who screams those cries. To hear the cry is the first step in inviting the One who cries into your life. His cry of life and death and living again will change you. Jesus' cry will pierce you, undo you, transform you; the cry of Jesus from the stable and from the cross will heal and save you.

The real challenge of Christmas is not deciding whether one baby can have two natures, human and divine. The real challenge of Christmas is whether you allow God's story to become your story. Will you give your life over to God's purposes for yourself, your family, for everyone? Even if asleep will you wake up? Will you surrender your notions of how your life should be, how the world should be, how God should be? Will you follow Jesus, accept his purpose in your life, surrender your life to him day by day?

He cries your name with earnest love. Listen with the ear of your heart, in the silence of this night, to the cry of the Savior. Invite Jesus' power, love, and life to be your life. This is true Christmas joy, and may your joy be perfected in Christ Jesus who tonight calls your name. Amen.