

Christmas Eve 2022

Imagine the shepherds on the hillside. It may be harder than you think. We live in a sensory-overloaded world. The nearly constant assaults on our sight, hearing, emotions—all our senses—are something even our recent forebears did not face. We rarely even see the night sky—do not see the grandeur of the Milky Way because of ambient light miles away. Ours is an intrusive, frenzied, noisy world—a constant barrage of sounds and images to distract us, induce us to buy stuff we do not need to feel better about ourselves.

The shepherds saw the night's unspeakable beauty. They heard and saw the night. Perhaps they looked down on quiet Bethlehem and thought of their families and friends, their troubles, and blessings. Maybe some said a prayer in the silence of the night.

Silence is rare now. Many cannot stand even a few seconds of silence, let alone 5 minutes, an hour, or a whole day. We are habituated to visual and auditory excess. We have lost something, and not just tranquility and self-worth. Jesus came to us, out of the silence. Imagine the scene in the stable. A young woman, perhaps 14 or 15 years old, in labor. Imagine her body writhing, her breathing, her moans, her pleas that it be over. The animals nervously shuffle because of her struggle. Joseph frets for his wife, whispers reassurance. And then, in the silent night, the final crisis of birth and the cry of a newborn.

Silence is not just the lack of sound however helpful quiet is to silence. Silence is the absence of distraction, the withdrawal from commotion, freedom from agitation. Silence is an attitude of mind and heart; a way of being engaged by the world, God, others, and ourselves, that is calm, forbearing, open, and gracious. Introverts, without talking, can be just as, even more, 'noisy' than extroverts if our heads and hearts are consumed with diversions, anxiety, and self-obsession. If your heart, through persistent prayer, is grounded in peace, tolerance, and love, it is possible to know and live in silence even when the world is going mad.

In silence, the Word became flesh. One challenge of Christmas is to be silent enough for the Christ to be born anew in us. Put aside distraction, withdraw from commotion, be free of agitation, let go of chaos. Desire the deep, holy silence of heart, mind, and body so that you may see him, hear him, hold him. Holy silence requires insistent desire: desire to live in, through and for Jesus. Holy silence grows with perseverance and patience. Make this your continual prayer: "O God of your goodness give me yourself, for you are enough for me. And if I ask anything that is less, ever shall I be in want, for only in you have I all. And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." *

I pray you know a Joyous, Holy, and Silent Christmas. Amen.

* adapted from Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (13th-14th Century)