

Christ Comes to Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

The most ordinary of pictures hung in the foyer of my parents' home. It was, to be sure, a picture of extraordinary people – a muted, faded depiction of Mary holding a newly born Christ in her arms.

It was a picture with no quantifiable value. As newlyweds, my parents had visited the National Gallery of Art, liked this picture, and bought copies to bring home.

As is true of so many things that seem ordinary, I walked past that picture dozens of times a day and scarcely noticed it. In a small home with a center foyer, it was nearly impossible to go anywhere without walking past that picture. Yet, it did not demand attention. Whether I noticed it or not, that picture of Mary and Christ was, quite literally, at the heart of our home.

Several years ago, however, I saw that picture in a new light. I was in my parents' home playing with a toddler who, at the time, was the baby of our family. I was bouncing him in my arms when the picture caught his eye. It was at his eye level and he paused to look at it. He pointed to the image of the infant Christ, smiled, and proudly announced his own name. He was so used to being the youngest and smallest in any family photo he saw that, I guess, he simply assumed that any baby in any picture had to be him.

I was amused by his confident confusion. At the time, I certainly did not see much similarity between the lively boy sans halo squirming in my arms eager to play and the calm, serene child in the picture whose tranquil face gazed back at us from the embrace of His mother's arms.

In the years since, I have looked at that picture again many times. Indeed, I have a copy in my own home now. I have also come to think that, perhaps, the beloved baby of my own family was wiser than I thought. As Christmas comes, I believe this more than ever.

He noticed the picture of Mary and Christ with fresh, appreciative eyes in a way that I did not. So often, the account of Christmas is so well known, so widely depicted, and so often read that it can be easy to forget how truly awesome that first Christmas was – and how awesome it remains. As an adult with things to do and places to go, I can so easily walk past a beautiful picture depicting Christmas day and not even notice it. Sometimes it takes a child's wonder to make new something that should never grow old or routine.

Much more than that, though, was the simple beauty in the way a young child looked at a picture of the infant Christ and so naturally and confidently saw the humanity of God. He looked at the picture and saw a child like himself. In that, he saw the inexplicable, incomprehensible beauty of Christmas.

He saw that the Creator of the Universe became a child like him.

He saw that the Savior of the world became a child like him.

He saw that the Redeemer prophesized about and longed for through the hopeful echoes of the centuries became a child like him.

He saw that the King of Kings became a child like him.

He saw that the God of all eternity entered time and became a child like him.

He reminded me once again that the great beauty of Christmas is so simple and yet so indescribably profound. As announced by angels to shepherds on a starry long-ago night and announced to me every day in a faded, oft-overlooked picture, God loves us so much that He became a child. He deigned to dwell in our ordinary times.

Merry Christmas!

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