

Blue Christmas

■ by Dr. Janet Irvine, Licensed Clinical Psychologist

In 1974, a delightful little book was published called "[The Best Christmas Pageant Ever](#)" by Barbara Robinson. A desperate Sunday School director offered donuts to any child who would show up to practice for the yearly Christmas pageant. Several "unchurched" kids from the wrong side of town turned up for the free donuts, and to everyone's horror, stayed on to take part in the pageant. The Herdmans lie, cheat, steal and smoke cigars. They bullied the church kids out of the prime pageant roles.

Tragedy, fear, and suffering integral to the first Christmas.

What was a very funny little book turned out to be a very thought provoking book. The kids had never heard the Christmas story before and were horrified by the events the rest of the church members had heard all their lives. They considered the Wise Men to be spies and King Herod the worst man in the world. Their shocking, intensely negative response to a favorite story rocked the church, which had become immune to this saccharine, hallowed story. Many had never stopped to realize the tragedy, fear and suffering that was necessary and integral to the first Christmas. The story left the Herdman kids enraged, shocked, and befuddled that such things could happen to a baby born to save the world. **For me, the book opened my eyes to the extremes that God went to in order to send His son into our world.**



Hermann Kaulbach - Weinende Madonna (Weeping Madonna)



James Tissot, The Angel and the Shepherds

A jostling, uncomfortable ride for Mary; no room at an Inn, far away from the comforts of family and home lying in a dirty stable on straw, a mean king who tried to trick the magi—all of these events incensed the kids, and made me stop and pause to wonder just how much pain, suffering and unfairness is part of the Christmas story. It was a painful, befuddling time for Mary and Joseph; alone and afraid; with strangers reporting visions of frightening celestial beings, and magi tracking them down with gifts that were actually more appropriate for a funeral.

Many Christmas celebrations have forgotten these pieces of the story. And all that celebrating has left many people feeling it is a time of great loneliness, fear, sadness and grief. For those who suffer during this holiday time, it is good news to know that we are in the company of Mary and Joseph, kings and shepherds, and especially a tiny baby lying on a straw bed, all of whom were uncomfortable, frightened and confused. While the rest of the world has gone overboard with other reasons for celebrating, we can remember that the main characters in this drama were feeling loneliness, fear, sadness and grief. The story unfolds to reveal that a Child was born, whose name was prophesied to be "Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." He was no stranger to pain, and from the first, those most intimately involved with Him were no strangers to pain either.

Take a break from routine celebrations and consider some alternatives. Celebrate quietly; reflecting on the miracle of new life in the midst of apparent chaos. It might be a quieter Christmas than usual for you; be sure to rest, reflect and take time for yourself. A "Blue Christmas" service, held at many churches, can be a helpful way to re-think Christmas.

The weeks before Christmas, called Advent, are being commemorated more and more in many churches. Decorations are kept to a minimum and a wreath is displayed with three blue or purple candles, the liturgical colors symbolic of reflection and waiting. One candle is pink, to recall the joy and hope in His coming. The church sets aside these days to help us remember the times of waiting, not only in the past, but the hope we have in our present waiting, and as we wait for the second coming when Jesus returns in glory. The stories of Advent parallel our own stories of waiting and hoping and our own stories of grief and suffering. Hope glitters through the evergreens as we remember that God came through in His promises to His people, and He will do the same for you as you grieve and weep.

Two thousand years before the birth of Jesus the Old Testament prophet Isaiah shouted, "Comfort, comfort my people." He reminds us that a "virgin shall conceive, and a child shall be born, and His name shall be Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." "Fear not," the angels remind us, over and over. ■



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It's scary and lonely and dark, but God is with us. In the quiet, lonely, tearful times, remember: He is with us. Emmanuel. Fear not.

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