



Where Shepherds Lately Knelt

I once said in an interview that I didn't think there would be any new Christmas carols, at least none that would "stick." I still pretty much hold that view. But, Christmas hymns are another genre, and we have here a "new" classic that will be with us as long as there are Christ-followers on earth.

This is a new trip to the manger, and a holy one with deeply meaningful insights and implications. The singer is escorted to the manger with a measure of gentle force to see anew that this new baby makes all things new. Even the baby's cry foretells the "still small Voice" of the Holy Spirit and the Lamb on the cross who will "cry one day for me." "No crying he makes" ?...not on this visit. This time the baby cries and the stable is filled with the gospel story.

Indeed, as we sing this hymn we are pilgrims, journeyers, strangely stirred. Sadly, the manger at Christmas has become an unlikely place to have our hearts blossomed open before cows and God and the gospel and all of scripture in a life-changing way.

There in the manger, in this singing, we find, as the prophets and angels had said, and as our hearts had hoped, Immanuel. Let us drop to our knees. A feed trough is a throne. There are more animals as witnesses than there are humans. How, then, shall we relate to animals...as the Creator did at the birth of the Redeemer? The margin of society has become ground zero for the glory of the entire universe. "Can I, will I forget how Love was born and burned its way into my heart unasked, unforced, unearned, to die, to live and not alone for me?" "...and not alone for me" and now, this trip to the manger has affected how I relate to all the other people on earth, all of them. I can no longer label enemies as animals, not with cows and sheep and donkeys watching all this. I must relate to all other people on earth, even my enemies, as persons for whom this baby cries and will cry.

Can one hymn change Christmas? Well, one baby changed life and death. One cry gathered up the entire biblical story. One stable changed the concept of servitude related to taxes and social standing and beasts of burden and beasts for food and common laborers.

There may not be any new Christmas carols that last, but there is a new Christmas hymn that will last as a classic, as a new trip to the manger every time it is sung. At least that is how it is for me (stanza 1), for me (stanza 2), for me (stanza 3), and not alone for me (stanza 4).

Terry W. York

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