

## Christmas Eve: Disarming Christmas

Jamaica Plain, December 24, 2008, Rev. Terry Burke

Near the end of the reign of George W, when Condi was Head Minister of the State, and Daval was the Governor of the Commonwealth, a child was born in the city of Lynn, in the bus station. The parents had fled raids where they were living, and sought relatives from their home country. The child was born in the women's room, as there was no money for a motel.

Attending the birth were two cleaning women, Anna and Lucia. They called their families to tell them that they would be late. Anna had been the midwife in her village of El Paisnel in El Salvador. After the birth, they wrapped the baby up in a small blanket.

Lucia went into the waiting room to announce the birth. Outside, three homeless men had been following the bright lights of the bus station, seeking a place where they could be warm. =0 AOne man was a musician. He had worked as an Elvis impersonator, "I am the King." Another was a popular writer who dreamed of becoming another Steven King. And the third simply liked to watch Larry King. As they entered, Lucia shouted, "Glory to God! Mira! Look!"

Sheepishly, the men entered the women's room. There, the three kingly types were amazed to see a newborn babe, wrapped in a blanket, sleeping in the basin of a sink. They

took counsel with one another as to appropriate gifts for the child. The Larry King man gave a sample package of perfume, Jungle Gardenia, and a small perpetual calendar. The writer king gave some Burt's Bees balm, and some plastic toy barnyard animals. The Elvis king gave a gold-colored dollar coin, and shared his paper crown from Burger King.

Then the Elvis king began to sing to the child a song made famous by Louis Armstrong, "It's a Wonderful World." "...I see friends shaking hands, saying "How do you do?" / They really say, I love you "

How does this story end? Maybe you know? The song "It's a Wonderful World" reminds me of our reading about the Bangor book store. Somehow, accidentally saying "I love you" to a stranger doesn't seem completely out of place during the Christmas season. Christmas is a time of disarming, letting go of some of our defenses and power, in the name of the Holy Child.

Power doesn't come off well in the Christmas story. The important religious leader Zacharias gets a message from an angel about his wife Elizabeth, but doesn't believe it. Mary, an ordinary person in a small town, believes the angel and says "Yes" to the divine request. King Herod, a great builder of monuments, sees a threat in the child, as he did in his own sons. Unlike King Herod and his learned advisors, the Magi, the three kings who were foreigners of a different religion from Babylon, seek the child.

This Christmas story has the disarming power to make our church pageant a thing of wonder, for children and adults. Congratulations to Thalia McMillion for 20 years of magical leadership! This disarming story also led a group of us to sing carols at the Shattuck Hospital last Sunday on a snowy afternoon.

Inspired by Nancy Ahmadifar's work with prisoners, we tried to carol at the prison medical unit of the Shattuck. When we exited the elevator, we were greeted by a glassed-in sentry post in front of a thick retractable metal door. The metal door opened into a vestibule before the barred prison unit. I explained who we were, and asked the guard if we could sing on the unit. "NO!" was the simple and emphatic response. "Would you like us to sing you a carol, do you have a favorite?" I asked the young man. "The First Nowell," he replied. We sang the carol, and he wished us a "Merry Christmas." Maybe he had disarmed a tiny bit. As we sang, the metal door opened to allowed persons in and out of the unit; we hoped that the prisoners caught some sounds of our Christmas song.

The men on the cover of our order of service heard that Christmas song when they decided to declare a soldiers' truce for Christmas in 1914. Defying generals, politicians, and religious leaders, they disarmed and played soccer together. If they didn't say "I love you" to the strangers, they didn't try to kill them either.

This strange and wonderful story of Christmas breaks into our ordinary reality, daring to suggest that power is not really important, that living God's unconditional love is what's

important. When we share that love and light, then, for the story that I told, we have our own endings.