

Sacred Reality



How do the embellishments to the Christmas story affect us?

Biblical details of the monumental arrival of God are sparse: twenty verses in the second chapter of Luke's gospel.

Thirteenth century artists guided their viewers' imaginations, but smiling horses and bulls are found nowhere in scriptural accounts of Jesus' birth. The visitors to the manger that held the Christ's precious newborn body did not see a halo around his head—or the heads of his parents.

When we think of God,
we seem quite ready to forget
the smell of dung that filled Jesus' tiny nostrils.
We would rather not ponder the effect on his tender skin
of the coarse rags he was wrapped in.
We gloss over the anxiety that must surely have welled up in his parents,
and hear choirs of angels without the accompaniment of animal noises.

What if we changed our mental and artistic images
of this sacred earthly welcome to reflect its harsh realities?
Would we be able to live more faithfully as Christ's followers?

Where might the true sounds, sights, and smells of the nativity
invite us to go?