



Shock Waves of Bethlehem

Mill Hill missionary Fr Chris told me about the experience of a friend in a black township in South Africa. The weary parish priest forced himself to attend the last part of a school play during the final week of Advent. This is how he tells the story:

“After the wise men had come and gone, I noticed the arrival of three more strange creatures. One was dressed in rags, hobbling along with the aid of a stick. The second was naked except for a tattered pair of shorts and was bound by chains. The third was the most weird; he had a whitened face, wore an unkempt grey wig and an Afro shirt.

As they approached, a chorus of men and women cried out – ‘Close the door, Joseph! They are thieves and vagabonds coming to steal all we have.’

But Joseph said, ‘Everyone has a right to this child – the poor, the rich, the unhappy, the untrustworthy. We cannot keep this child for ourselves. Let them enter!’

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The men entered and stood staring at the child. Joseph picked up the presents the wise men had left. To the first newcomer he said,

‘You are poor; take this gold and buy what you need. We will not go hungry.’ To the second he said,

‘You are in chains and I don’t know how to release you. Take this myrrh; it will heal the wounds on your wrists and ankles.’ To the third he said,

‘Your mind is in anguish. I cannot heal you. Maybe the aroma of this frankincense will soothe your troubled soul.’

Then the first man spoke to Joseph,

‘Do not give me this gift. Anyone who finds me with this gold will think I stole it. And, sadly, in a few years this child will end up a criminal, too.’ The second man said,

‘Do not give me this ointment. Keep it for the child. One day he will be wearing chains like these.’ The third visitor said,

‘I am lost. I have no faith at all. In the country of my mind there is no God. Let the child keep the incense. He will lose faith in his Father, too.’

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While Mary and Joseph covered their faces, the three men addressed the child,

‘Little one, you are not from the land of gold and frankincense. You belong to the country of want and disease. You belong to our world. Let us share our things with you.’ The first man took off his ragged shirt.

‘Take these rags. One day you will need them, when they tear the garments off your back and you walk naked.’ The second man said, ‘When I remove these chains, I will put them at your side. One day you will wear them – then you will know the pain of humanity.’ The third said,

‘I give you my depression, loss of faith in God and in everything. I can carry it no longer. Carry my grief and loss with your own’ The three men then walked back out into the night. But the darkness was different. Something had happened in the stable. Their blind pain was diminishing. There had been a kind of epiphany.

They noticed the stars now.”

by a man from Central Africa, The Wonder of God is taken from an article by Daniel O’ Leary,