

“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus...” As I read the Christmas story again this year, I am struck by the ordinariness of it all. A young couple of low economic means sets out on a long trip in order to fulfill a required obligation. Never mind that the timing couldn’t be worse. She is *great with child* and yet they set out. The traffic is terrible; so many people on the road! Had they lived in the 21st century, perhaps they could have flown — but then their flight may have been cancelled or at the least, disrupted. As it is, they travel on foot and donkey navigating dusty roads and numerous crowds until they finally reach Bethlehem, a town bursting with government officials, travelers, merchants and tourists. Having made no room reservation, they are stuck going inn to inn until they finally find accommodations in the worst place ever. Dark, dreary, smelly, allows pets, and most likely not a part of town where anyone would choose to spend the night! Nonetheless, there they are; and there in that place she *gave birth to her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.*

This comes as no surprise! Nine months pregnant, hard travel; labor is bound to ensue. But then the story begins to shift. Extraordinary breaks into the ordinary! Out in the fields somewhere the sky suddenly breaks open and shepherds see angels. No mere hallucination here, that is, unless they all simultaneously experience the terrifying vision and simultaneously hear the astounding message, *Unto you is born this day....Go and see.* And meanwhile, foreigners chasing a star arrive, unannounced, bearing outlandish gifts; not the usual blankets, diapers and pacifiers but gold and aromatic spices of frankincense and myrrh. Something odd, something extraordinary, is certainly happening here.

But as I pondered the happenings of that night so long ago, the night when the ordinary became extraordinary, I began to have a feeling of *deja vu*. I could swear that the same thing happened to me just last Sunday. There I was sitting and singing amongst our congregation when suddenly all of our voices were joined *with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven...* Mysteriously the extraordinary had broken right into the ordinary as the bread was broken, the wine was blessed and Christ was there, made visible among us once again. And not just among us, but in, with and for us; each one of us — children, moms and dads, young people, old people, strong people, feeble people — all of us in our brokenness; each made whole once again and joined together in this one body of Christ. As the miracle unfolded, sunlight streamed through the rose window; and the colors twinkled off the various shards of glass, shimmering and lighting up faces all around — so many faces in this wondrous body!

As the star illuminated the child, Jesus, so it illuminates us. And so it continues to light our way as we go forth into the world *graciously accepted as living members of our Savior Jesus Christ* and bringing his extraordinary light and love to all the world.

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!*

*Elizabeth Goodine, Spiritual Director*