



An Advent Meditation with James Finley
Unedited Transcript

I'd like to share with you a little Advent meditation. That when we read the Gospels in the spirit of faith, everything that Jesus says and everything that Jesus does, everything that happens to Jesus reveals to us on how God is present in our life. And the way Jesus responds to the situations and people in his life reveals to us on how we were to respond to God's presence in our life.

So in that spirit then, in a story in the Gospel relating to us the story of Jesus' birth, that Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem in compliance with the census imposed by the Caesar, and everyone had to report to their town of origin. And so Joseph being of the house of David went with Mary late in her pregnancy to Bethlehem for the census. And while they were in Bethlehem the time came for Mary to give birth, and probably because of all the people in Bethlehem, because of the census, there was no room in the inn. And so they had to go to a small stable and Jesus was born in the stable, Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes and put him in a manger, and he was born there out in the dark in the stable with the animals.

And so the lesson for us then is what does this story teach us about how God is present in our life. And to me it seems that a lesson is this that there was no room in the inn, but God came anyway. The fact there was no room in the inn did not stop God from being born into this world, and that's the lesson, because that's always true. That sometimes in today's world, whether it be through mass media or just the things that are going on internationally, and the way we as human beings treat each other, or sometimes just in our daily life, the hectic pace that we have to keep to just stay ahead of the day's demands, along with the complexities of it all, it seems that there's no room in the inn. That is there's no hiatus from it all. But we know in faith that as true as that might be God comes anyway. That God's being born into our life moment by moment, breath by breath as the interior richness of every little thing that happens to us and everyone around us.

It's also truth sometimes, not just in the world but in our own families, or sometimes just what we're going through our self and all the ragged unfinished business of things. It seems that there's no room in the inn. That it's just all like closed up or too filled up with too much complexity and maybe things that shouldn't even be there in the first place. And as true as that might be we can take reassurance that as true as it might be God comes anyway. That God's being unexplainably born in our hearts moment by moment, breath by breath.

But here's the thing. In order to discover that we have to leave the hurly-burly of the inn and the superficiality of it all and the chatter of it all, and find our way in the dark back to the stable. That is, we have to enter into the humility and the simplicity and the patience and the delicate nature of what's unfolding in our heart to discover where God's being born in our life. And in this kind of prayerful attentiveness we are then asked to bring that delicate simplicity out into the hurly-burly of the world. Katagiri Roshi, a contemporary Zen master, once said that it would be so much easier if we were asked to live a simple life in a simple world, but we're asked to live a simple life in a complicated world. And I think this is how God's born in our hearts and in simplicity of heart we do our best to live with integrity in a complicated world.

And I'll end with this final little note for me, personally, as a Christmas meditation. One of my earliest memories is my mother would take me to mass on Sunday and we always sat right up in the first couple of rows, it was off to the side altar. I was maybe three years old. I know it was Christmas



time because there were Christmas trees up in the sanctuary and there was a nativity scene. I remember she let me play with her rosary. It had green glass beads and the church was very crowded and a little baby started to cry somewhere in the church and I can remember whispering in my mother's ear, "Is that the baby Jesus crying?" and I remember her leaning down and whispering in my ear, "Yes, it is." And I believed her. And today at 74 years old I still do believe her. Not in the naive way that a small child would believe it, but knowing that in Christ it's revealed to us that every child is worth all that God is worth and the truth is, for all the complexities and things of which that simplicity has been buried under, these so many things, there is in our heart this childlike purity, this childlike, really the God-given Godly nature of who we simply are because God loves us and so for us Christmas then is us being awakening to this birthing of God in the simplicity of our hearts, in the depths of our life, in the complexities of whatever the day might bring.

So, I share this meditation with you.