

MM Fall Blue Sheet Number 6 — Advent 2014



Morgan's Moment...

One last photo of Christmas Eve 2013...
candles glowing to Silent Night...
me in red in the corner.
Just one corner of the crowded Deli...
where most of my family sat...
with Ted's family standing in back.
The Deli will be dark this year...
for the first time in 30 years...
lighted only by memories.
I like to think candles will be glowing...
warm memories scattered many places
undimmed by distance and years.
I open a collection of my prayers...
prayed on Christmas Eve's
since 1983...Here's one...
*"Let us receive the true gift of Christmas...
that we are loved...
that we are valuable...
that God is born in us.
Let us give the true gifts of Christmas...
the gift of faith...
the gift of hope...
the gift of love.
Let us lift a light against the darkness...
the light of joy...
the light of encouragement...
the light of peace."*

—Art Morgan

TED COX – Old World Deli



A great man and friend who allowed us
inside the inn for 30 years. He said to me:
"It's been a great run."

THE WONDER OF CONCEPTION

Before we opened presents at my grandmother's house she always had someone read the "Christmas story." It was many years before I learned how much she edited out.

I never heard Matthew telling us about the perplexing situations involving Joseph and Mary's marital situation. It has one quotation from Isaiah saying that *"a virgin shall conceive and bear a son."* The conception issue was not clarified and is still in dispute. The chairman of my ordination committee asked me if I believed in the virgin birth. Before I could try to answer he slapped his knee and said: *"Arthur, if anyone ever asks you that question, don't answer it. They don't know what they are talking about."*

And grandma never had anyone read about the wise men and the slaughter of the infants under old Herod the King. Most people still don't know that part of the Christmas story of Matthew.

No wonder my grandmother chose Luke's version!

What I know is that we heard the Luke version about Joseph and Mary, *"who was with child."* I didn't even hear the poetic story of the conceptions of both Mary and Elizabeth who were to mother Jesus and John the Baptist as cousins. We skipped right to *"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled..."* and ends with the baby lying in a manger with shepherds and angels and all. And then we could open our presents.

Except for Matthew and Luke there's no word about Jesus' birth. It was the fifth century before Christians began celebrating the birth of Jesus.

Now, I believe conception is a miraculous event. It is no small thing to participate in the perpetuation of your species. To have a new life closer than breathing and to be in love with that life before it's birth is a holy thing. We wish every child could have parents who believed that way.

One of the things I liked best about our type of Christmas Eve service was that we always chose an infant from the crowd to portray Jesus. Most of the time no one had any way of knowing whether or not their child would be chosen to stand in for the Messiah. We anointed thirty messiahs over those years at the Deli. (Actually, thirty three messiahs because one year we had three!) Last year one of our first "Messiahs" came with his second child chosen as Messiah.

No mother can know such things. The various Bible stories use up a lot of angels and mystical moments and even heavenly choirs to show Mary what a wonderful baby she was having. Most mothers don't need all that to know their baby is special.

Of course, as we have come to learn, all of these stories are embedded with early Christian beliefs and creeds that gradually evolved into the story about who Jesus was. I like the point the stories try to make, Jesus' holiness was human born. He was born in tough times. Roman soldiers didn't have sensitivity training.

Anyway, here comes another Christmas with rich biblical stories too complex to be properly discussed in so few weeks. The wonder of conception is too amazing and so filled with hopes and fears that no one can explain it. We need to catch the idea that more possibilities exist than we can imagine, not just for baby Jesus but for ourselves. It all begins with conception.

If anyone asks you to explain it, don't even try. Just wait.

I speak as an expectant great-grandfather. Happy Advent.

— For the Moment, December 5, 2014

A MOMENT MINISTRIES Publication, Art Morgan and Paul Pritchard, Ministers
25921 SW Airport Avenue Corvallis Or 97333 a-morgan@peak.org