

What's tinsel got to do with it?

A cold winter's night in the northern hemisphere. A smelly stable, crowded with sweaty animals resting after a long journey while their owners sleep comfortably in lodgings nearby. But not so for the couple who tentatively come in from the bitter cold outside. The young woman in the throes of labour just needs a sheltered spot to give birth. And so she drops on to the soft hay at her feet and goes into a birthing position. She is just a girl of maybe 14 years or so but she has her wise and caring partner by her side.

Where is the girl's or the man's family? We know that the couple have travelled to the family town to be counted in a census. Where are other people that care that this young single girl is about to give birth? There are no bright lights here, no clean and well equipped delivery suite, no midwife to help with the birth. This is an unmarried couple shunned and ostracised by society and totally alone about to deliver a child in a very unsafe, unhygienic and uncomfortable environment.

It's not a quiet night, aside from the movement and noise of the animals in the stable, there is the usual street noise outside and visitors keep arriving. Inside, the young woman is in the throes of delivery. Hardly a silent night. Not now and certainly not when the angels burst into song and the eager visitors arrive.

When we picture the night of Jesus birth as it really would have been we have quite a different scene than that which our society traditionally depicts. The actual reality isn't exactly the image that we have on our Christmas cards and in our nativity scenes. It's about as far away from tinsel and gaudy decorations as you can get. And there's certainly no Santa Claus or reindeers in the true story.

Why is it that our society has to sanitise and supposedly, glamorise this story? Surely it's not that we can't handle reality. It seems that modern day media viewers are well used to all the gory details being depicted in real life stories. Maybe there was a time when society demanded that we be discrete with tales of actual birth and tough circumstances. But no longer does societal decorum demand that. We can tell the story as it really is. The God of all

creation chose to become a vulnerable baby, birthed into a world that was poverty stricken and grossly unjust. He risked birth to a young girl (historians suggest probably only 14 yrs) in an environment that was widely open to infection, including tetanus. And that was only the beginning of the risk and stress he exposed himself too. How can we ever say that God doesn't care or know what it is like to be human if we truly know the Christmas story?

Perhaps this Christmas it is time to put aside the tinsel and trappings and truly celebrate this amazing God of ours who became vulnerable human flesh and came into this world as a precious little baby.

Let's get real with our faith and be open and honest as we tell the true story of Christmas. Many you have a blessed and meaningful Christmas as you contemplate the birth of Jesus/Immanuel whose name means, 'God is with us'.