

Well, it is almost Christmas! This evening we are told the stories anew and drawn into the newness suggested by the birth narratives. There is a new Savior, a title formerly reserved for the emperor. A new Lord—a new Messiah, the royal anointed One. On this Christmas Eve, we celebrate a new beginning—the dawning of a new light.

Back in those days of old, the Good News was announced to lowly shepherds, rather than to the so called powerful ones. The Good News announced that something odd and extraordinary had happened.

There was nothing cyber or high tech about it to relay that news. Back then, it was brought by caravan and travel gossip. Unless, of course, it was really important news—then it was brought by a runner, an athlete whose link to the good news drove him across mountains, where his whole being ached from the effort. His feet were probably crusted with calluses, and maybe even torn by the rocks and thorns in his path. But they were not ugly feet—they were beautiful because he brought news that was truly good.

Calvin Miller tells a story about a man who was imprisoned for 2 years in Castro's Cuba. He was a missionary who had a single Bible that he tore into many sections and then secretly circulated among all the missionaries who endured imprisonment with him. His wife was not imprisoned with him but decided to stay in Cuba and took an apartment near the prison where her husband was. She knew where his cell was, and there was, amazingly, a window in that cell.

She would take their very young son and walk him past the prison every day. She would sometimes stop the baby carriage and take the child from the carriage and play with the baby in clear view of her husband's cell. She knew that he was watching, and it was her delight to remind him of the steadfastness of God

in dark times. The mother and child were free, of course, and in the passing of years her husband was finally set free.

Calvin says that “there was great rejoicing among all of us when the great news came. Like the words of a mountain courier, the good news came running to us on beautiful feet.” But I imagine amidst the joy of liberation, there was that enduring image of a courageous mother bouncing a baby boy on her knee.

Jesus’ birth signals the start of a new way—a new understanding of what it means to be alive. Aliveness, Jesus will teach, is a gift available to all by God’s love and grace. It flows not from taking— but giving, not from fear—but from faith, not from conflict—but from reconciliation, not from domination—but from service.

It does not dwell solely in the rules and rituals, temples, and traditions. No—it springs up from our innermost being like a fountain of living water.

And so—the runners, the watchmen and watchwomen, and the shepherds have told us the center message of every Christmas, and it is this: “Our God reigns”.

Thanks be to God!