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Are We Ready Yet?

J. Daniel Gibson

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Text: Luke 2:1-7

“In those days...Joseph also went ... with Mary ...”

I wonder ... Was it something like this?

* *Mary, are you ready?*

I've got the donkey –

he's all fed and watered.

And I've put the thick blanket on him,

so you won't feel his bones pressing into you

all the way to Bethlehem!

Are you ready, Mary?

How I wish we didn't have to take this trip right now.

How I wish we didn't have to do this trip at all!

You are in no condition

to make this bumpy tiring journey.

Mary, are you ready?

I spoke to the officials;

I asked if we could postpone the trip;

I asked if we could register here

and have the document sent to Bethlehem;

I asked if I could just go myself

and leave you here.

But they just accused me of being a trouble maker.

Or, maybe it was like this ...

* *Joseph, are you ready?*

I've got the bag packed.

*A change of clothes for you and me.
 And I've packed some of the swaddling cloth
 that Elizabeth sent over to us,
 now that her son John no longer needs them.
 I don't know how we'd be able to do this
 without Zechariah's and Elizabeth's help.*

*Are you ready, Joseph?
 I wish we didn't have to go,
 but I'd rather be with you,
 than to stay at home alone and worry.*

*I'll be OK, Joseph.
 I trust God,
 and I know I can depend on you.*

*Joseph, are you ready?
 Maybe ...
 we can make it all the way to Bethlehem,
 get registered,
 and get back home again before the baby comes.*

Since we are freely speculating
 about how it might have been for Mary and Joseph,
 let's continue to wander and wonder in our minds
 about some of the other characters
 who participate in the Christmas story.

We can ask each of them
 how well *they* are prepared
 for the coming of the Lord.

** Hello, Gabriel!
 What's it like to be an angel?
 You have visited Zechariah
 and told him about the birth of his son, John.
 You visited Mary
 and told her about the Lord God having chosen her
 to be the mother of the Saviour.
 But your job isn't done yet, is it?*

*Are you ready to greet the shepherds?
Ready to tell them the good news
of the Saviour's birth?*

And what about the rest of you angels?

*You've been practicing your "Gloria in excelsis Deo!"
for several million years.*

Do you know that the time is almost here?

*That the night of nights is only one day away?
Angels, are you ready?*

** And shepherds, are you ready?*

You will be the first to hear the good news.

You will be invited to "come and see".

You will see with your own eyes

what God is doing for you and for all people.

The Saviour of the world

will be born within walking distance

of where you spend every long night

doing your endless job

week after week

month after month.

You know exactly what the prophet meant when he said,

"The people who walked in darkness

have seen a great light" [Isaiah 9:2]

You know all about darkness

and what comfort and joy there are to be had

in the light of a campfire or a lamp or even a candle.

This time, however,

you will hear about the Light of the World,

the Christ who will bring God's radiance

*right into the **inner** darkness of our lives.*

Shepherds, are you ready

to embrace the Light of the World?

** And you, Mr. Innkeeper ...*

we don't even know your name ...

are you ready?

You're so busy running a business

with all the preparations and details in a very hectic season.

*The new census and tax
 have everyone on the move;
 and they all need lodging and food.
 It's great for your business,
 but you are looking and sounding so frazzled –
 everyone wants the room with the Jacuzzi,
 someone isn't satisfied with the bed,
 there isn't enough parking,
 the kitchen staff want overtime ...*

*But ...
 something special, something wonderful
 is going to happen
 in the overflow area out behind the inn
 in a quiet corner of the parking garage.*

*The Son of God
 will be born under your roof,
 barely noticed among the droves of important
 paying guests.*

*Are you ready, Mr. Businessman?
 Can you fit Jesus into your schedule?
 Should he make an appointment?
 Is there room in your datebook or your palm-pilot?*

** And what of you, weary travellers,
 heading by camel to Bethlehem
 and by plane to the East or West Coast?
 You've made your preparations,
 and packed your gifts
 and made your plans,
 and you look forward to wonderful reunions with family and
 friends.*

*Are you ready
 for what may be an unexpected meeting
 with the Christ Child
 at some point on your busy journey?*

*He may be at the airport; or
 He may be the woman
 ringing the Salvation Army bell
 accepting small donations at the mall; or*

*He may be the little girl
in the refugee family
down the street and around the corner; or*

*He may be the homeless man
asleep in the bus stop shelter; or*

*He may be
in a manger
in a stable ...*

*One thing for sure:
you are going to run
or walk
or ride
or drive*

*or fly
very close to Him, and very soon.*

Are you ready?

** And what of you, busy shoppers,
desperately rushing,
frantically trying to meet all the deadlines,
granting all the wish-lists,
filling all the stockings,
mailing all the cards,
cooking the turkey,
keeping the cat from climbing the Christmas tree,
stopping the children from opening gifts early,
trying to remember a little gift
for the mail deliverer
and the paper deliverer
and the custodian of the apartment building....*

*And, of course,
remaining serene
and relaxed
and beautiful
and cheerful through it all.*

*Are you ready to receive the One who says,
"Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest"? [Matthew 11:28]*

Are you ready to receive the One

*who **doesn't** come into the world
to make your life more hectic or frazzled
or to add to your burdens?
To receive the One who **will** come
to bring you peace and joy,
and freedom and relief?*

** And what of you, Preacher Dan?*

*You are so concerned
that everyone should know
what Christmas is all about ...*

Are you ready, yourself?

*Or, are you like the dentist
who has cavities in his own teeth?*

*Or, like the plumber
who is too busy to fix his own pipes
and now his basement is flooded?*

*Or, like the fire department
whose hall burned down
while they were out on a training exercise?*

Preacher Dan,

*have you become so "professional" in your exercise of
spiritual leadership
that you have forgotten to prepare **yourself**
for what you want everyone else to have?*

Are you ready, Preacher Dan

– for just one night –

*to **be** one of the shepherds running to Bethlehem
and not be their tour director?*

*to **listen** to the angel choir
rather than direct it?*

*to **be** one of the **sheep**
under the care of the Good Shepherd?*

*to kneel quietly and worship **Him**
and nothing else*

until your soul is refreshed and renewed?

Everything is set.

Are **you** ready?