



O HOLY NIGHT

the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth;
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.

Placide Cappeau

Greetings from Catholic Engaged Encounter of Trinidad and Tobago
May this Christmas bring peace, love and joy to your home and may
the light of Christ guide you and your family into the New Year.



Kendell and Latoya Celestine
National Coordinators, Catholic Engaged Encounter Trinidad and
Tobago

We pray the grace of this season enables us to be more like
Jesus in humility, generosity and complete submission to
the will of God, especially in our families. May God inspire
us to see His presence in the ordinariness of life, our situa-
tion with COVID, and the marginalized and discriminated in
our society. Joy and peace in your hearts and your homes!



Tony and Angela Mitchell
Caribbean Coordinators, Catholic Engaged Encounter

Christmas Greetings to the Catholic Engaged Encounter Family



*As we enter the season of Christmas, remember that Jesus' birth is a
gift from God that brings hope to all humanity. Let us as couples and
families look to the example of the Holy Family and keep our eyes
on the Christ Child, remembering that the strength of the family lies
in its capacity to love and to teach how to love. For all a family's
problems, it can always grow, beginning with love" (Amoris Laetitia
53).*

Raymond and Tricia Syms, Episcopal Delegates, AFLC



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*"To catch the real meaning of the "spirit of Christmas,"
we need only drop the last syllable, and it becomes the
"Spirit of Christ."
~Thomas S. Monson~*



5 Lessons couples can learn from the Christmas story

by Sarah Coleman



Once upon a time there lived a couple in love. They had known each other for as long as they could remember. They were engaged to be married when the unthinkable happened - she fell pregnant. And it wasn't his.

Even so, they decided to go ahead with the marriage. Within weeks they embarked on a journey, but it was no honeymoon. They couldn't book a hotel room, and she went into labor without a birthing suite in sight.

Their relationship was less than ideal. There were complications, doubt, trust issues, and instability, not to mention the sacrifice to raise a child not their own. But they determined to make it work. It was their destiny to raise the Son of God. Together. Their love story is a marriage lesson to us all.

1. Trust God

"Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.' And then the angel left her." (Luke 1:38)

It may not make sense. The situation may seem impossible. The odds may be stacked against you. Trust.

Trust God. Trust He knows what He's doing. He knew what He was doing when He entrusted the birth of His Son in the care of two young people. He knew what He was doing when He brought you and your spouse together. The Father will work all things together for good. Trust in Him.

"Mary responded, 'I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.' And then the angel left her." Lk 1:38

2. Trust your partner.

"As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. 'Joseph, son of David,' the angel said, 'do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.'" (Matthew 1:20)

Perfect love casts out all fear. Don't allow fear to rule your marriage or the love you share. Marriage is often painted in a negative light. Media portrays affairs and suspicion as a normal part of a relationship. But they aren't. Trust your partner. Love him without fear. Without doubt.

3. Love can grow in difficult circumstances.

"When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife." (Matthew 1:24)

Unfaithfulness. Bad financial decisions. Unemployment. Wayward children. Blended family issues. It's not easy. But neither was ridicule for marrying a pregnant woman who claimed to have seen an angel.

"Go on the journey together. Two are better than one."

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Neither was a journey to Bethlehem with a woman about to give birth.

In difficult circumstances love can grow. It won't be easy, and your patience will be tested, but love is purified and strengthened in the fire. Mary and Joseph loved their baby but they also loved each other. They did not allow tough situations to drive a wedge between but to mature their love.

4. Walk it out. Together.

"And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee." (Luke 2:4)

Mary and Joseph embarked on the journey of giving birth to the Son of God together. They had each other's backs. They didn't have all the answers. But they could not do it alone.

Go on the journey together. Two are better than one.



5. Look for the stable.

"She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them." (Luke 2:7)

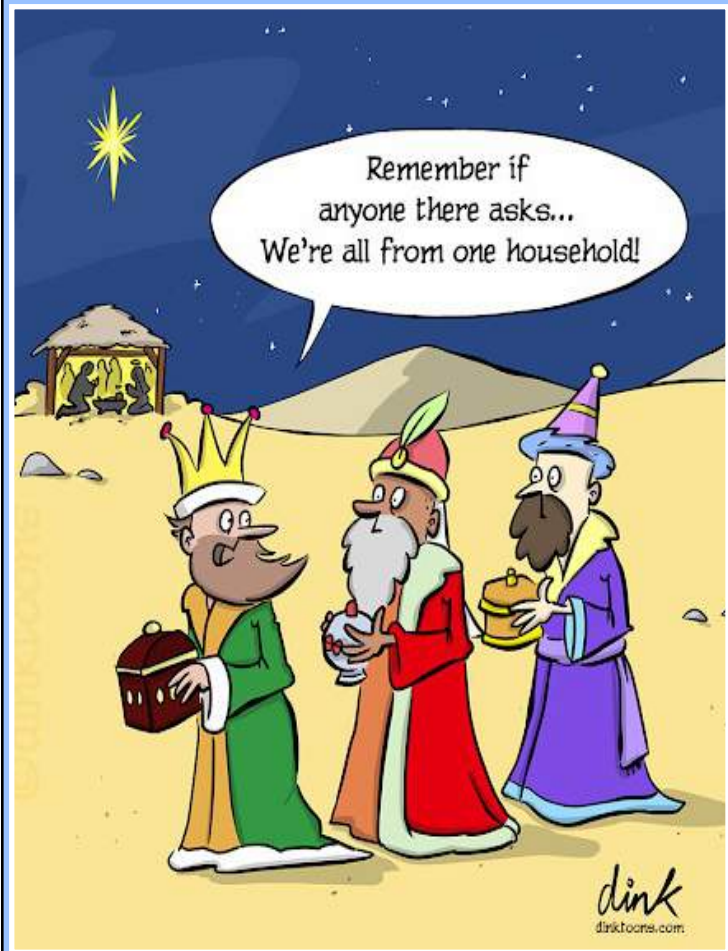
Though we are talking about a family who lived 2,000 years ago, a stable was not a common place for a babe to be born. My guess is it was neither comfortable nor pleasant smelling.

Yet a miracle occurred in the manger. You may be living in your own "stable" right now where life just plain stinks! Look for the silver lining. Look for the hidden blessing because it is there. You will discover your very own miracle when your change your outlook.

Pray with me:

Father, I don't know what is going on. The situation we face seems impossible. And our marriage is in the firing line. I'm not sure what to believe or who to trust. The road ahead seems hard, even impossible. Give us tenacity and perseverance. Lord, I believe we will experience our own miracle in the manger. The fight, the struggle, the journey will be worth it in the end. I know you are faithful to answer my prayer. Amen.

Adapted from <https://www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/5-lessons-couples-can-learn-from-the-christmas-story.html>



Angels are clean. Angels are beautiful. They seem almost otherworldly, since girl angels always seem to know their parts better than do boy shepherds. The angelic satin stuff goes pretty well in most Christmas pageants. The problems come with the shepherd's clothing: rough, fibrous, unattractive.

Do you know what real-life shepherds were like? Townspeople looked down on them. "Herdsman!" they'd huff derisively. Shepherds would work with sheep all day, sleep outside with the animals at night, and then come into town dirty, sweaty, and smelly. Like boys.

Tradesmen in the marketplace would be polite enough. Shopkeepers would wait on them, but everybody was happy when they moved along. Burlap fits the part. It really does.

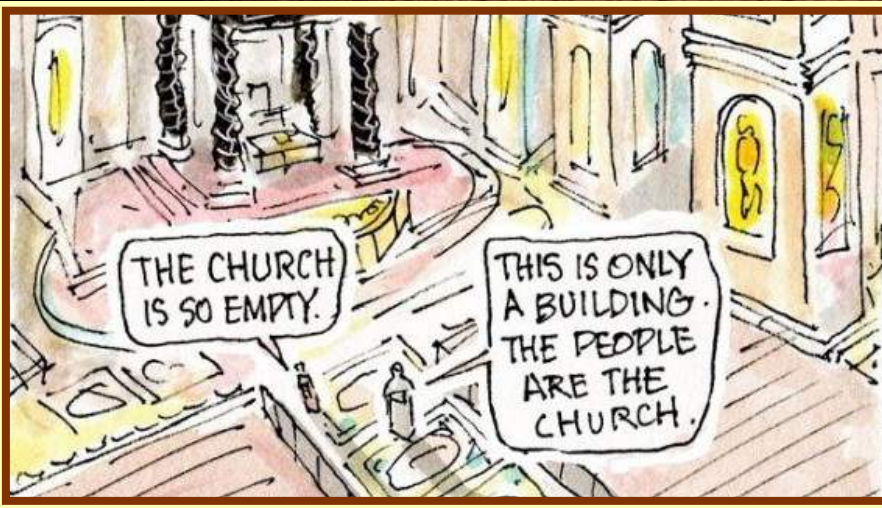
Burlap, Boys, and Christmas

Angels seem appropriate to the birth of God's son. But straw and sweat and raw, rough, fibrous clothing do not. Why, I ask, would the Son of God Most High enter life amidst the rubble of human existence, at the lowest rung of society, in obscurity and at the stable-edge of rejection even before he is born?

And as hard as I think about it, I come back to one truth. God wanted to make it explicitly clear that He came to save each of us. He comes to the slimy, dark corners of our existence, the desperateness, the loneliness, the rejection, the pain. He comes to unswept barns and cold nights of despair. He comes because he understands them. He knows them intimately and came for the very purpose of delivering us from those raw stables to real Life.

Life that angels proclaim and humans long for. To be loved, actually loved by God in spite of ourselves. God reaches out to us in our misery, not just at an occasional moment of high spirituality. God, who sees us at our worst, offers us His best.

Adapted from <http://www.joyfulheart.com/christmas/burlap.htm>



IMMUNIZING YOUR MARRIAGE DURING COVID-19

By Aaron Siloni

Located between two coronavirus “hotspots,” watching the economy shut down, and worrying about our high-risk loved ones, our anxieties simmer and sometimes get the best of us. Will our income be cut? Will our home suffer more damage as we await critical repairs that have now been postponed? Will our children fall behind academically, as we unskillfully try to educate each on different learning platforms? You know the story because you’re living your own version of COVID-19. Add your worries to this list. We all feel it: this is too much Lord.

Our marriages are strained. We try to team up and endure difficulty with grace and patience. Maybe we do well for a day or two. But, if you’re like us, your usual pattern of relating to each other under stress reappears. The temptation is either to turn on each other or to turn inward in pre-occupation during these times. Some of us maximize the threat, while others minimize it. But each of us consistently use one approach over the other. It’s so normal for two spouses to deal differently with stress, chaos, and uncertainty. Under duress, one becomes controlling, louder, and angry while the other quickly grows withdrawn, silent, and irritable. One is hot anger. The other is cold anger. Neither is good. There’s no need to evaluate as to which is better or worse, but of course we do.

What’s worse is that we start keeping a mental accounting of which of us is more impacted. If your children are at home, you can compare who gets more uninterrupted time to do the tasks required, or who is parenting better or more. If it is just the two of you, you can easily compare who is working more around the house, or you might dwell on simple annoyances that are more easily overlooked with some healthy separation. Resentment can build.

But the truth is, God has given you this person for just this moment in time. Your spouse is not *the* enemy (Eph. 6:12), but someone who, just like you, is weak, suffering, and prone to struggle under this stress. Moreover, your spouse is your co-laborer in a historical moment that can, if left unchecked, weigh your marriage down with anxiety, depression, anger, and growing resentment. What can you do not to flounder in the fog and friction of this “war”? How can we actually strengthen our marriages during this pandemic?

Here are six things we are finding helpful.

Value faithfulness above productivity

We are living in a historical moment that we will likely not see again in our lifetime. It is good to remember we are not in normal routines. In our home, we are trying to continue working while also homeschooling our stir-crazy children who think they’re on holiday, and now have access to technology throughout the “school day” (which means constant temptation to venture from spelling to YouTube or any number of apps). We are holding important virtual meetings from our bedrooms, and trying to schedule them when someone is not practicing the piano. Yes, it is good to try to keep life as normal as possible, to prioritize order and a clean organized home, but things are not normal right now and we need to make allowances for that. Our daily task list will look different each day and we must adjust our standards for productivity accordingly.

God has given you this person for just this moment in time...
You are a team with a common opponent

Our daily temptation is to measure the success of our days by what we accomplish. But, this time of life should remind us that bearing fruit is not the same as getting things done. The fruit we seek is the fruit of being faithful with what God has given us today. Galatians 5:22 is clear on that, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” When we call this to mind, we are less tempted to withhold grace by judging our own or our spouse’s productivity.

Entrust yourself to the true Protector.

While we wait for a declining curve of coronavirus cases, we can be tempted toward trusting in false gods and not even know it. If we wash our hands, don the right mask, get the right anti-viral drug, stand six feet away, or receive enough money from the government, we will be OK. These are all increasingly prudent things to do, but good things make bad gods. Our hope is not in these things; our help is in the God who rules every molecule of our universe. It is good to remind ourselves that he sustains the sparrow (Matt. 10:29–31), he commands the wind and waves (Mark 4:39), and he is Lord over every detail of the created order (Job 38-39). Your Father has you and your family’s life square in the palm of his hand. This day’s hope is not in protecting you and your loved ones from the coronavirus or economic harm. This day’s hope is in the true Protector. With security rightly placed in him, we can relate better to one another.

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Walk in love on a path to prayer

Countless blogs and books have been written encouraging husbands and wives to pray daily together. Almost all describe how prayer works to foster intimacy as a couple draws near to God and one another. Prayer is a significant way to grow a stronger, more unified and intimate marriage. But when Peter writes about prayer, he actually moves in the *opposite* direction than we typically think (1 Peter 3:7, 12, & 4:7). He does *not* focus on the emotional and relational benefits of praying together. Prayer is *not* primarily a means of relational intimacy. Peter says it's the couple's relationship that helps their prayers. How a couple relates to each other makes their prayers either effective or ineffective, powerful or hindered, free-flowing or clogged. And it also impacts how God hears and responds to them. He has a special openness to our prayers when we are treating each other with understanding and honor. He is particularly vigilant and attentive to us as we genuinely seek peace and one another's well-being.

So, in these times of quarantine and restriction, pray! But do so with a heart attitude that prioritizes *the ability to pray* with hopeful expectancy that your prayers will rise unhindered to God's ears.

Clothe yourself with humility

Living in a bunker together with an invisible enemy surrounding you may have drawn out depths of your hearts you did not see coming. We're living in (too) close proximity with those we love but without the daily graces of routine, healthy separation, and maximum productivity. Most of us do not operate optimally when we are anxious and feeling threatened. Sin is very real and we will see it! Like the man who wears a shirt and tie to his Zoom meeting but below the camera shot sits in red running shorts, we can put on a good show for those "out there," while our spouse and children have a clear view of the selfishness and conceit in our



hearts. Yes, this is discouraging as we aim to bear fruit.

But rather than despair or resort to the well-worn patterns of relating to each other under duress, use this time to practice humility and repentance. In God's economy, *these are*

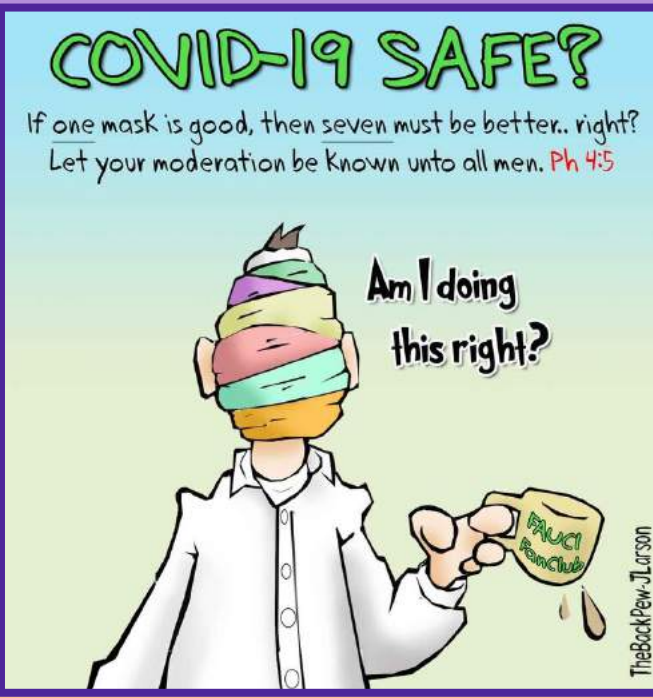
some of the most powerful moments of intimacy in marriage. Like reviewing an algebra problem that went awry after making an error as you tried to solve the equation, go back, locate, and fix the mistake you made with your spouse before trying to move forward. Be very suspicious of your heart, erring on the side of not trusting your motives and calculation of wrongs done to you. Let no offense fester before you go to your Father and ask for conviction on how you started, responded to, or escalated the strife. Then quickly repent, go, and repair with your spouse.

Prioritize encouragement

Our words are powerful in the lives of those around us. They can build up or tear down, bring healing to an offense or escalate a fight. What a privilege it is to wield such tools to buoy a discouraged or fearful spouse. In the last two years, we have faced the hardest years of our life together. Many nights we have found ourselves recounting the events of the day and turning to each other for comfort, faith, and affirmation. By God's grace, we are not often both defeated on the same night. So it seems to work out that we take turns reminding each other of God's sovereignty, faithfulness, steadiness, and goodness. We have read the

Psalms to each other as we fall asleep, or placed our phone on the pillow between us to softly play a favorite worship song that reorients our heart to the Father who loves us. We have gently spoken truths against the accusations, fears, and doubts that attack (especially at bedtime) so the other can drift into slumber.

During this pandemic, do not underestimate the importance of reminding your spouse of what is true, worthy of praise, and commendable—especially as the day wanes. Read Scripture; sing songs; pray with and for one another; speak encouragement.



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You are a team with a common opponent

The anxieties and exhaustions of this season tempt us to turn on each other. Just last night, we had words over a parenting issue, phrasing our discussion as if the problem was the other's fault. Perhaps there are things our spouse needs to see and change, but treating our spouse as the enemy attacks your teammate, not your opponent. As we battle out COVID-19 and its effects on our family, we need to strategize how we can confront this problem together. One thing our family does often is call a family time-out. We stop normal activities and call everyone together to get a game plan on how to tackle a situation as "Team Sironi." Far too often we have gone beyond the point of "this isn't working," and it never ends well.

Why not do this with your spouse too—a routine reorientation on how things are going and what needs adjustment. How can we share the added load of educating our children? How can we jointly enforce house rules needed to make things operate more smoothly? What are the besetting weaknesses and sins in each of our hearts that we can watch out for and preempt? What tempts us to turn inward in an unhelpful way when our relationship faces heat?

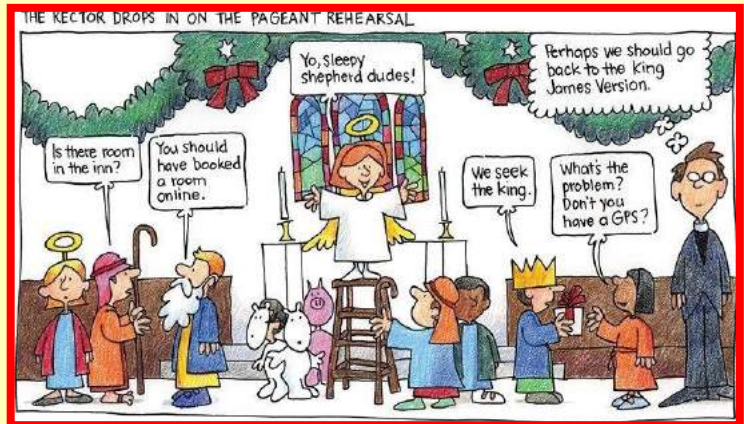
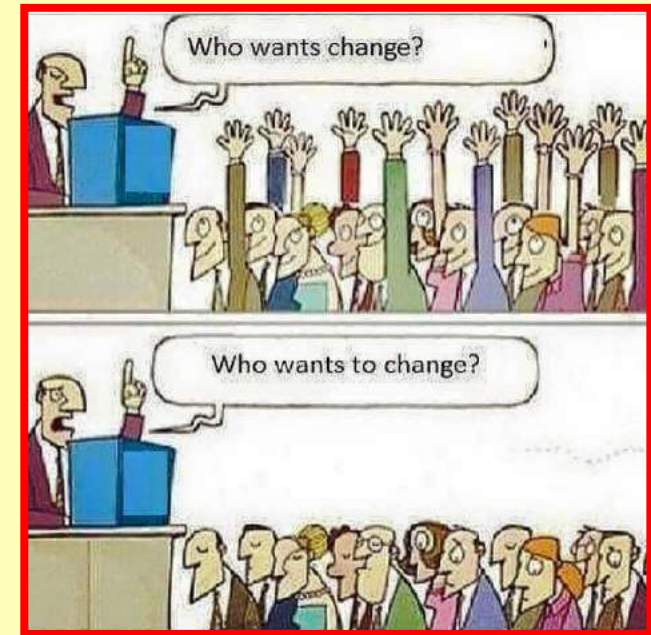
All told, COVID-19 is challenging all of us in one way or another. Some of us are deeply enjoying this extra time together. For others, the wheels are coming off. But let's be candid—being confined at home will bring out the life-long differences and incompatibilities within your marriage. The virus has not caused these things but intensified them. This is *not* likely the time to try and change your spouse's habits or to resolve the differences between you. Recognize that these differences will heighten in this season and give each other grace. Don't make big marital decisions but take Leo Tolstoy's advice to heart: "What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are but how you deal with incompatibility."

Will you join with us as we try to use this time of quarantine to fortify our marriage? It is hard to see now, but when the COVID-19 crisis has waned, we will look back and see how God used this time for our good and his glory.

Adapted from <https://www.ccef.org/immunizing-your-marriage-during-covid-19/>

"God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If he gives us the gift of Christmas it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it."
~Pope Francis~





Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year
From The CEETT Family

