

SANCTUARY LONDON

FINDING HOME. TOGETHER.



*"But Mary
treasured up all
these things and
pondered them in
her heart."*

LUKE 2:19

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHRISTMAS...

My wife, Sarah, loves hearing the song *Mary Did You Know?* at Christmas time, and I know others who grimace every time they hear it. Either way, it certainly raises some interesting questions. Yes, the angel came to Mary, and explained that her baby would be the Son of God. And besides, the angel said, "do not be afraid". Easy right? At likely 13 or 14 years old, I do wonder about all the emotions she must have been feeling.

What about Joseph? We don't often think too much about him. He was told to take care of Mary and the baby... But the child wasn't even his! Talk about a bag of mixed emotions!

As I write this, it is the morning after our big Christmas celebration. It was our tenth time celebrating together as Sanctuary London; our official anniversary is January 1st. We had hoped that after a crazy year, we would be able to go all out for our party. After all, we all really needed a reason to celebrate. Because of COVID-19 restrictions requiring a maximum of 50 people dining in at one time, we planned to host four separate parties over two days. Although we wouldn't be all together at the same time, we decided with less people all at once, we might actually be able to spend more intentional quality time with each person. In spite of everything, with lots of extra special things planned, it was going to be the best Christmas party ever!

Then the news came on Friday Dec 12 that London was moving to the "Red Zone". Less than five days before our first scheduled party, we had to cancel.

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We did our best to make the most of it anyways. We decided to have a festive turkey meal with all of the fixings handed out at the door, along with gifts for everyone. The first few people showed up around 2pm to wait in line, and by 5, the line was as far as we could see down Talbot Street. Over 200 people came through. Our amazing volunteer Scott and his son Anthony ran up and down the line up all evening delivery hot chocolate, coffee and tea to help keep people warm while they waited. It wasn't the 300 people we are used to celebrating with, but in some strange way, there was that small taste of things being the way they are supposed to be.

At the end of the night, we gathered as a staff team to reflect on the evening. What immediately stood out to each one of us was the overwhelming graciousness and understanding of our community members. Communication with our community can be challenge at times, so with little notice, many showed up expecting the party to go on as planned, only to have to wait in line for up to an hour for food to go. Still, there were no words of complaint. Everyone was thankful, and, while we tried to apologize, our people would rebuke us, saying, "Don't you dare apologize! There's nothing that you could have done. We're just so thankful that you decided to stay open for take-out!"

Everyone was thankful. In this way, the night was symbolic of the past year since March. People living in poverty are the people most affected by the closures and changes caused by the pandemic. And yet these are the people demonstrating grace, love, and understanding to me.

As I write and reflect, I begin to uncover so many mixed emotions I have bottled down inside for so long. We've

hired two incredible new staff this year, who have brought new joy and excitement to our team. We've already lost a few friends due to the cold, and the winter has just barely begun. We've joined the WISH (Winter Interim Solution to Homelessness) Coalition, and are working very hard to help provide a warm and safe space for at least 60 people to survive through the winter. Just when things were starting to feel normal with 50 people allowed inside to eat, greater restrictions come into effect, and we are back to handing out meals at the door. We continue to dream and get excited about longer term solutions to homelessness. Our people, even those who are housed, are lonelier than ever before. Joy and pain, joy and pain, joy and pain.

And yet, we **hope**. We hope for an end to this pandemic. We fight for more affordable housing in this city. We hurt with those who are broken and alone. We long for those who crave a little healthy touch to receive a hug, or a shoulder squeeze to nudge them out of depression. We pray for a little more **peace** on earth as it is in heaven.

What about you? How will you be celebrating this year? How will you embrace your own mixed emotions? What will you do to share your brokenness and your **joy** with others? Whether you are alone, or if you are able to celebrate with those in your household, I pray that you will not allow this unique Christmas to pass you by without finding new ways to celebrate the blessedness and hope of the season in the complex simplicity of our world today.

Stay strong my friends. Thank you for supporting the Sanctuary London community.

On behalf of all of us at Sanctuary, and with much love,

Darryl Reckman



RIVER WALK REFLECTIONS

Heather Fieten

I'm the new kid around here. I mean, I've been around for a while, six years on the board, helping where I can, volunteering when I'm able, but as far as being immersed in the Sanctuary community I'm pretty much wet behind the ears.

And I knew that had to change. In order to be able to do my job well I have to know what's going on in all areas of the ministry, so, on a Tuesday morning I pulled on my rubber boots, honestly, a little resentful I had to wear them because they're not very comfortable for walking, grabbed a warm coat and mittens and joined Gil and Jonny (Ark Aid) for a walk down by the river.

We made a big jug of coffee, grabbed sandwiches, granola bars, some mitts and hats, a couple sleeping bags, some fire starter and headed out to visit people that have become friends as they navigate a life lived outside the boundaries of what I have come to expect for myself.

We approached a couple of tents set up under a tree to provide some shelter, and when I say tents, let's be clear, they were structures covered in tarps to keep out the wind and the rain and were tentative at best, We called for "Andrew" to see if he was home. The site had a fire pit that would be the envy of any camper, well built, dug into the ground, lined with bricks and surrounded by several chairs which spoke of evenings trying to stay warm in the company of others, a sign of community and fellowship. Andrew emerged looking pretty groggy, and happily received a warm coffee, and some other supplies and food we could offer. As we asked him how he was doing he talked about "Robert" who had settled into a tent behind him and was having a rough time. He was detoxing and had been sick and very vocal all through the night. Neither of them had slept much. At one point Andrew had walked over to Robert's tent and said "Hey, I'm going to take your boots" and brought them back to his tent. I looked confused and so they all explained to me that in the middle of December, when it is cold and snowy and you're in the middle of coming off a high and the only way you can see to be out of pain and suffering is to go find another high, it's really difficult to navigate a muddy, wet, freezing field without something on your feet.

Sometimes friendship looks like taking someone's boots.

We met individuals and couples who were happy to see us, people who were grateful and kind, articulate and informed, cared for themselves and those in their community around them.

You can label people, they can be unemployed, homeless, addicted, living rough, mentally ill, down on their luck, whatever term you want to use. But what they are, what we all are, are human beings created in the image of God worthy of friendship and respect and care. The spark of the divine lives in ALL of us, together.



*Thank you so much for
supporting the Sanctuary
Community through 2020.
Merry Christmas
from all of us!*

