

A Modern Day Christmas Story - written by Gareth McMillan

In the dark of a run down block of council flats. Mary, just 15 years old sits alone in her small damp room. Joseph has just left her for the night. As she gets ready for another night, a blinding light fills the room. What can only be described as a warrior shining in white stands in front of her. He tells her that she is carrying the son of God. That he will not only change her life, but the lives of more people than she can possibly imagine.

She has a problem with this. "I've never slept with anyone, not even Joe. In fact all my friends, are telling me, I have to get him into bed, but he won't"

She is interrupted half way though, and told not to doubt the power of Yahweh. That though him nothing is impossible.

As the weeks and months since she is told pass, she gets shunned round her estate. Just another number to add to the ever growing number of single teenage mums. No one (except Joe, who has been told in no uncertain terms to stick with Mary) believes she hasn't been sleeping around. Eventually kicked out of her room at home, her parents wanting nothing to do with her. She moves in with Joe. The room, Joe is renting from a mate, but its cold, damp, there is mold growing on the walls, in a part of town, that you stay away from at all costs. Its all they can afford.

The time comes, and Mary gives birth. Jesus (Jay) is born, in the same damp run down room. Hardly the place for a King. Hardly the place for a baby that is meant to change the future of the world.

On the night of the birth, in the same building, the same brilliant light fills another room in the tower. This time, not appearing to Mary. But appearing to the prostitute who live there. Seeing one client after another, hoping to get enough to buy their next fix. Even in this place, they are the lowest. The most despised. Their life has fallen apart, and not stopped.

Confronted with the glory of the Angels. They fall face down, sure their time has come, that this is the end. The Angels, rather than destroying them, tell them, in this very building. The hope of the world has just been born. A boy who will one day change everything. Who will bring hope to millions like them. They are told where to find him. So they run down to the flat they have been told. Joe however, isn't keen on letting them in. Joe and Mary, may not be living in the best of conditions, but they do have standards. After finally convincing Joe they find Jay. Lying there, and Mary, the young mother, looking tired, confused, but with love for her son, full in her eyes.

Over the next few years, Mary and Joe struggle to make ends meet, however they manage it. If only just. There seems to be a constant flow of visitors. Ever stranger and strange people. All wanting to see the baby. But perhaps non more strange than the Clerics from the local Mosque. They come, wanting to see a saviour, they find Jay, just another naughty two year old. They bring gifts; Gold, for a king. Frankincense, for a Priest. And Myrrh, to be buried with.

Shortly after this, Mary and Joe are forced to flee. Having fallen deeper in debt. They have no option. Their lives are in danger along with that of Jay. They have heard stories of what

has happened to people in their position. They move far away. And Jay continues to grow up. The string of strange visitors stops. However a day doesn't go past when Mary doesn't think about all that's happen, and wonders if she really did see that Angel.

Questions

- What was your initial reaction to the story?
- How different do you think it is to the original?
- Do you think it works well as a modern version?
- This new version adds some extra thoughts such as 'Mary wonders if she really did see that Angel', Do you think Mary in the original story had those thoughts?
- Finally the gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh are still in the story, what do you think of that? Is that a strange thing to leave in?
- Does anything stand out in the new version?