

“Gabriel’s Diary — A Love Story” based on Luke 1:26-38

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You may have heard about some of the surprising archeological finds in the Holy Land in past years: Writings such as the Nag Hamadi Library and those of Qumran; the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary. Well, it turns out there's been a new find more recently. Its authenticity is a bit suspect, I'll admit, since it's written in English and has modern phrasing and word usage. It's also not a book or letter but a diary — Gabriel's diary. I'd like to read it for you today since it seem appropriate:

“Dear Diary: Here we go again. I know, it’s been eons since I last wrote, and it seems I only write when I’m all hot and bothered. But I really can’t talk about this with the other archangels. They don’t understand that the Chief doesn’t mind disagreement or even a good argument. Whenever I raise the least objection to what the Chief proposes, they warn me, ‘Remember Lucifer.’ (Ah, poor Lucifer! He used to be such a nice fellow.) But there’s no hiding my many qualms about the Chief’s plans, anyway. As the Great Omniscient One, the Chief knows all about them already, probably even before I know them myself! So I don’t suppose there’s much use in putting a lock on this diary.

“Anyway, the Chief is at it again. You remember how I protested when the Chief made those wretched creatures called humans, and devoted all that attention to them? Why, they’re so pathetic they can’t even get from one place to another without taking time! And then, the Chief made them male and female, like mosquitoes and mice. And they all die! Again, like mosquitoes, but at least the little bugs can fly!

“But the Chief just said, ‘I love these creatures so much that I made them in my own image.’ They are like the Chief alright — with a mind of their own and impossible to understand! Can you imagine? They traded an entire garden for a bite of some fruit! Well, you know the Chief. When I asked, ‘Why do you care about them at all? They’re so miserable!’ the Chief just looked at me and said, ‘That is precisely why!’

“And remember our other disagreement about the Jews being chosen for some of the Chief’s most special work on Earth. ‘What about the Egyptians?’ I protested. ‘After all, they’re much better builders. Or the Chinese, an ancient civilization and a relatively sophisticated people (as far as people go!)? Or the Romans with their organizational abilities?’ But the Jews it would be. ‘A people of heart and soul, Gabriel’ the Chief says, ‘like Moses, Ruth, and Jacob.’ ‘Yes,’ I say, ‘faithful women and men, but so insignificant.’ But the Chief just said, ‘That is precisely why!’

“Now, to top it all, the Chief has decided to make these humans adoptive children, like royal heirs. Can you believe it?! Not only that, but the Chief has decided to become more present to them. You’d think the burning bush and the pillar of fire would have been enough. But, nooo, the Chief wants to become one of them. Imagine! One of them! Fortunately, the Chief can be there and here at the same time. Otherwise, pardon the language, but all hell would break loose here!

“Anyway, a few months ago the Chief told me to go tell this young peasant woman about the plan. ‘Huh?’ I said, ‘A Jewish peasant engaged to a carpenter?’ Well, you think I was surprised! You should have seen the look on her face when I told her, ‘You’re the one, kiddo!’ I tried to tell her all would be well but it about knocked her sandals off. The truth is, I really didn’t want to go, but when I told the Chief it was a mistake to actually become one of these lowly creatures, I got the same enigmatic non-explanation: ‘That is precisely why!’

“Well, now the Chief’s at it again. I’m to rehearse a choir to announce the birth. Sounds promising, right? And, just where do you think we’ll be performing? That brand new theater in Ephesus? The Chinese imperial court? The Roman Coliseum? Wrongo! We’re to sing in the middle of the night, in some backwoods little burg in Judea. And the audience? A handful of shepherds and some mangy sheep! Ai-yi-yi! Why such unlikely people and places? We already know the answer don’t we? ‘That is precisely why!’

‘So, here I am, doing my duty, and wondering what the Chief will be up to next. You know, I wouldn’t put it past the Chief, while on earth, to associate with all sorts of undesirables, comforting them, healing them, trying to help them get along with one another... and to end up getting into all kinds of trouble with the authorities!

“Well, I’ve gone on long enough. The heavenly choir still needs a bit of work and I’ve got a message of ‘good news of great joy for all the people’ to learn by heart. Besides, I’d better quit before I live up to my nickname. Until next time — Gabby.”

Well, you’ll have to judge for yourselves about the authenticity of this text. But, to me, its sentiments and themes are absolutely authentic.

The Christmas story is the most surprising, revolutionary, beautiful, hopeful story in the world of how God chose to enter history and enter our story. It could have been different. People of Jesus’ day were expecting the Messiah to be born into power and purity, in preparation for wiping out Israel’s enemies. Instead, God chose a frightened young girl named Mary bearing the scorn of her people for being pregnant out of wedlock. Her rejection is part of the Christmas story because rejection is part of our story. God chose a peasant carpenter named Joseph who wrestled with his doubts and fears. His doubts and fears are part of the Christmas story because doubt and fear are part of our story. God chose for Jesus to be born in an obscure town where there was no room for him, in a place that was dirty, dark, cold, and lonely, because that hostile, uncaring world is the same one with which we have to contend. The first visitors to the manger were shepherds, considered ritually impure, because we also know what it’s like to be excluded. Mary and Joseph had to take the infant and flee as refugees to Egypt, because powerlessness is part of our story too.

The Christmas story is not a story about might. It’s a love story. A message from God to the world — to you and me. This is where God wants to be born. This is where God wants to be known as Immanuel — God-with-us. God enters here because this is where we most need God. And the only way I can respond to this story is to open my heart, and find the rejected, poor, frightened, doubting, lonely places inside myself, and remember my sisters and brothers who also know rejection, poverty, fright, doubt, and loneliness. Let us tear down our walls of fear, pride, and shame, and invite God in. For the human heart is precisely where God wants to be born, that this story of love might become a love story for all the world to share.