Description

Of Course There Would Have Been Women There That Night

Jo McAndrews – Young People Support Worker

https://www.jomcandrews.com/

About

Jo qualified as a psychotherapist and currently trains and supports parents and professionals who work with children, to understand how children grow with resilience and what gets in the way of that

Image not found or type unknown
Jo Of course there would have been women in Bethlehem that night. There is rarely a baby born alone in the world when there is a free woman nearby. I imagine that the first was the inn keeper's wife, let's call her the other innkeeper. She would have been dashing from the stove to the bar when she heard her husband turning that couple away. Maybe he was a good man and disappointed them kindly, but she saw the huge belly, recognised the lowdown posture of a baby about to drop into the world. She would have put down the plates she was carrying and laid her hand on the small of that poor tired woman's back. Warmth and understanding relieving the ache, in that tiny, profound gesture.

It would have been that other innkeeper who led the couple to the barn, made a clear cosy refuge and brought blankets to make beds on the straw. Maybe she settled them, then went back to the inn and called the kitchen girls to make extra stew, it was going to be a long night. Then maybe she called on the old midwife, the woman who had caught nearly the whole town in her gentle hands as they had each arrived. The old woman would have summoned her daughter, called her away from her own children to come and help her greet this new baby, receive this new life into safety.

Place of birth



They would have made their calm and smoothly urgent way to the innkeeper's barn, wondering if there was time to move this young about-to-be-mother to their own small house, or one of their neighbours. They would have knocked on a few doors as they went, asking for blankets, sheets, water, lamps for when the darkness fell. There would have been bustling and excitement, laughing and calling as the women dropped their usual busy activity to turn towards the arrival of new life in their midst. At least one of them would have offered to make up a bed. Maybe they arrived at the barn and realised that none of them could offer anywhere more comfortable than this spacious shelter. Or maybe it was just too late to move this young woman already shouting with labour pains.

Even a miracle needs a mother in a story

The old midwife would have looked into her eyes, that frightened traveller, and told her that everything was going to be fine, that she was there and would help her bring this baby safely to birth. She would have relaxed, Mary, the only one whose name we know, the only woman recorded to be at the birth of Christ. Even a miracle needs a mother in a story. I imagine the women settling in for the long and busy wait, sending the older children on errands for more food and drink, another jug of water for the labouring mother. They would have shared their memories in the quieter moments, of the many babies they had birthed and helped to birth. The midwife would have reminded them of their own stories, the one who came out backwards, the one who arrived before she could even get there. Silent exchanges of looks and murmured blessings as they remembered the ones who arrived cold or whose mothers did not make it through. Only the cheerful stories out loud tonight to offer reassurance through the fearful moments. Grief has its own time.

Birth partners

Maybe Joseph was there cradling his wife's head and humming tender sounds to soothe her. Or maybe he was passing the anxious time in the crowded bar of the inn, being treated to drinks and being slapped on the back, or perhaps hewas pacing backwards and forwards through the familiar town of his own birth, thinking about his mother and wishingshe was there to see him become a father. Maybe she was there. She could have been the midwife herself. How can weknow except through our imagining of this bit of the story that was never written or has long disappeared?

> Something special was happening and everyone wanted to be part of it

Anyway, in the barn, I imagine the group of women growing in number as the word gets around town. A traveller arrived tonight and about to give birth, needing company as her own family are far away. I can hear them singing quietly or raucously depending on the changing needs of the moment; gentling, encouraging, reviving her exhausted spirits. Our innkeeper would have brought hot stew and warm caked from the oven, in her element, caring for those far from home and needing hospitality. Her good husband would have taken on her other work for the night, calling on his brothers to help. Something special was happening and everyone wanted to be part of it.

The birth



I imagine that tiny and most welcome baby arriving just before dawn, as the sun rose high enough to send its rays through the gaps in the barn walls, illuminating the floating straw dust in a halo of shining light. The birth of the sun of life, the birth of the son of God, meeting in that holy moment of wonder. New healthy life, slippery and warm, squalling with surprise at the shock of air into his lungs for the first ever time. His first breath and the whole company sighing with relief. This ordinary, extraordinary miracle that accompanies every new child of God as we arrive in danger, blood, pain and amazement. Of course they wouldn't have put him in a manger, why would they when there were so many eager arms and Mary's warm breast waiting for his first suckling?

Those women who dropped everything to bring company, practical care and love for a stranger..

I can imagine the star that had shone surprisingly brightly through the night, still twinkling in the early morning sky, making the miracle visible for hundreds of miles. We are told it summoned kings. Gold, frankincense and myrrh. Rich gifts indeed. But the gift of those women is beyond royal reach. Those women who dropped everything to bring company, practical care and love for a stranger; a women giving birth is known and held by all mothers. We each have a nativity story, even those of us who have never been recognised as sacred.

Of course there would have been women in Bethlehem that night.

How would the world be had we never forgotten that?

Let us remember now.

Category

1. News & Views

Tags

1. mental health
2. resilience

Date Created
11th December 2024