

## **In a Manger**

*Joanne Prenzler Smith*

Our son was born in November. A long-awaited second child I thought I might never have.

Christmas was fast approaching when our pastor asked if we would let our son be baby Jesus in the Christmas Eve production. Our church, like many others, loved to tell the Christmas story with the children dressed as Mary and Joseph, angels, shepherds and wise men. I was a bit nervous about leaving our baby in the care of children, but when it was decided that I would sit among the little ones we agreed. We had a doll on hand to swap over if he became unsettled.

Christmas Eve arrived and I made sure our son was well fed and freshly changed just prior to the service. As people took their seats I placed him in the wooden manger at the front of the church and stepped away. Despite all that was going on around him, our son, wrapped in a white cloth and nestled in his little bed, promptly fell asleep.

I know we would have sung carols such as 'Silent Night,' 'O Little Town of Bethlehem,' 'We three Kings of Orient Are'. I don't remember exactly how the performance went that night. The story unfolded of the Virgin Mary called to carry a child that was God's and not her new husband's. Of the young husband shocked but standing by his wife after an angel visited him. Of them travelling the rough road to Bethlehem where Jesus, the Saviour of the World, was born and was worshipped by men of both high and low rank. How angels sang to welcome him to earth.

The details are a bit of a blur. But I know how closely I watched my son just out of reach and in the care of others. This child was my miracle, my gift from God, and here I was entrusting him to children. Did God feel this way about his child?

Our son had lain quietly throughout the service, sleeping peacefully in his makeshift bed. We got to the part of the story where God came to earth, as Jesus, became a human baby for us. Our son stirred and stretched, waving one little arm high in the air. An audible gasp ran through the congregation as they suddenly realised the baby in the manger was real. It brought home that Jesus' birth is not just a nice story, it actually happened. He was and is real. A gift, a person and a promise.

When the service finished I was able to take my son and hold him. He slept through the whole thing, oblivious to what was going on around him. But he played a role that Christmas by simply lying in a manger.