

The Baby Changes Everything
A Sermon on Luke 2:1-20
Christmas Eve, 2016
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

Luke chapter 2 verse 7, says: And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

She laid him in a manger....

Have you ever taken a moment to look at the beautiful nativity scenes that are on the front of many Christmas cards?

Mary always looks stunning, of course, as if she's just returned from a weekend spa retreat. Joseph looks stately and in control. Sometimes he's shown casually resting his elbow on a nearby calf.

And then there is the manger-- a feeding trough. This is really the only detail that the Bible gives us about where Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus stayed. In the usual scenes, the manger looks like a plush, comfy straw bed. And as for Jesus, he looks like what the hymn tells us: "The cattle are lowing the Baby awakes But little Lord Jesus No crying He makes." Usually there are a few animals who look ready for the state fair. They look into the manger longingly. Perhaps they are in awe of the redeemer of creation, or maybe they just wish their trough had a little less baby and a little more feed.

As many of you know, our second child, Hannah, was born last Friday the 16th. I confess that I can't help but look at the Christmas story with fresh eyes this year. I think if we were to pause for a second and consider any of the detail from pictures of the manger scene, it wouldn't take a great amount of imagination to realize that they probably didn't match the reality of that first Christmas.

Mary does not look like she has just gone through the pain and strain of childbirth in a place that is, to say the least, dirty. Joseph does not look like someone who has struggled to provide even these inadequate accommodations for his laboring wife. And the little Lord Jesus, well, I'll just say I have a hard time believing "No crying he makes."

So on the one hand, the usual Christmas card picture is completely wrong. But that's not the whole story. In every nativity image I've ever seen, all eyes are on the baby. How could it have been any other way? I imagine that Mary and Joseph could have penned that old hymn as they gazed at Jesus: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace." This baby is good news. And this particular good news is more powerful than the pain of childbearing and the struggle of providing for one's family. This baby changes everything.

Now, every single baby is little miracle in and of themselves. And single every baby is a gift from God. Those who have spent time around babies know that every baby has the potential to demand your whole being. You can't be indifferent toward a baby. Of course you don't have to give of yourself for the baby. You can choose to not give the baby the attention it needs. But in a sense, responding by changing your life is the

only appropriate response. Indifference isn't an option. Babies change lives.

And baby Jesus isn't your average baby. With Jesus' birth, as the reading from Titus said, "the grace of God has appeared." God is not far away and detached from the circumstances of everyday life. He's not the gray-bearded old man who sees you when you're sleeping, knows when you're awake, and knows when you've been bad or good. God is so much more than that. Jesus shows us that God is one who comes down into the reality of life-- right into the dirt and the muck. He comes weak, poor, and helpless.

Like Mary and Joseph in the Christmas card manger scene, we gaze at that little baby. And if we grasp what's going on, this baby has to change us.

This is God incarnate-- God in the flesh. Let that blow your mind. God has become mortal. God has become killable. The eternal, infinite creator of everything that exists became a baby as vulnerable as my little girl. He needed to have someone feed him and change his diapers. He couldn't see things at a distance for weeks. Mary put him somewhere, and all he could do was lie there and wiggle, coo and cry. Jesus, the God of the Universe made flesh, was every bit as vulnerable as my brand new baby daughter. Even more so, since King Herod would soon put a target on his back.

We have to let this confuse us and shake us before we begin to understand the meaning of Christmas. Like Mary we have to treasure all

these things and ponder them in our hearts. What *does* this mean? How could all-powerful almighty God do this?

Our God is so Holy, so far above us, that we could never reach God. We can strive to be good, but can try to do our best, but we find ourselves captive to the power of sin in our lives. But this is the essence of the good news: God loves us so much, that God becomes human to help us. God does not first come in judgment, but in love and mercy to help us. God becomes human in order to defeat the power that sin has over us, and to give us the eternal life that God always desired for humanity.

The hymn we just sang, one of my all-time favorites, puts it like this:

Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.

This is what God does for us. And even in this scene, we can discern pointers to how God will work this out.

We see Mary lay the baby in an old rugged feed trough. Later he will be nailed to an old rugged cross.

Here Jesus is rejected by an innkeeper, later *the crowds* will reject him and shout, “crucify him.”

Here Mary wraps Jesus up in cloth, later his garments will be stripped from him and gambled for.

This baby is God’s rescue operation for us. There was no room for Jesus so that we could dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Or to paraphrase

one of the Church's ancient teachers, God becomes what we are so that we might become like who God is in Jesus.

The angels don't bring good advice about how to live. They bring "*good news* of great joy for all the people." The angels essentially say, 'something in the world has changed, and you have to respond.' For to *you* and to me is *born* this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the **Lord**. This baby changes everything. Will you let yourself be changed by this baby, who is God with us? Will you give yourself to Jesus?