



Sermon December 24, 2011

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Pastor

Sisters and brothers: A wise person said, “Every new born baby is a sign that God has not yet given up on the world.” Truer than true. A baby brings out the best in us, and gives the best to us.

We get to be playful around a baby. Sophisticated grown ups give in to “kitchy –cooing” while tickling the baby. Baby talk is permitted – if not always encouraged. Adults do a ton of other silly things with a baby that they would never do otherwise. Affection takes a playful turn.

Babies encourage peacefulness in us. Parents and Grandparents will sit for hours holding a sleeping baby. No one is hurting or being hurt. It is necessary to keep awake so the baby doesn’t get dropped!

Hope comes with every new born child. When you look into the face of a baby you know that you are seeing the future. It may be this child who will choose your nursing home, and if life comes to that it’s “ok.” This child may

continue the generations in your family – a hope that life will go on and on and part of each of us will go with it.

When a child is born love calls to love. No words are necessary, but there is no mistaking the reality. Love is born. Love is renewed. Love moves into time and on into eternity.

A baby brings out the best in us and gives the best to us. A baby also requires the best of us.

Every new born child comes with a set of challenges. Some of us met them without being overcome by them. Others have yet to discover what awaits them.

Babies call for great responsibility on the part of adults. The baby needs to be fed. Diapers have to be changed as the Bible warns: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” My wife and I tried to share the burden of diapers, though each of us plotted to make sure it wasn’t our turn when the diapers were dirty. I think my wife cheated. Babies have to be bathed. For many it is fun. For some parents it is fun, too. There are often questions about who gets wetter.

No baby comes into the world with an ability to tell time. If it is 2:00 a.m. when the baby's tummy is empty someone has to get up. It doesn't matter how tired the adult is – the baby has to eat.

Every child born into the world means that finances have to be re-arranged. You wait for the first tooth and then start saving for braces. Thoughtful parents read books to the little one and then start saving for college.

Of course there is always some anxiety. Parents worry whether they will be good at the ministry that is theirs. They wonder if the child will thrive and do well growing up in the world.

“Every new born baby is a sign that God has not yet given up on the world.” Your child or grandchild prove the wisdom of the sweet saying. Your experience is testimony that a baby brings out the best in us and requires the best of us.

The Child whose birth we celebrate late on a winter evening is further proof that “every new born baby is a sign God has not yet given up on the world.” Though not our Child in the usual way, he ends up being our Child in the fullest sense.

God entered the human adventure as a baby to bring out the best in us.

The Child is among us to enable us to recover our playfulness. When God created the first human beings God intended that they have a life that was all play and no work. At first it worked out well. The human beings got along with one another. The animals were vegetarian – the lamb could lie down with the lion and the lamb didn't have to keep one eye open all night. But God's intention was not honored.

The human ones began to believe their own press releases and before you could say "Adam's Apple" they messed up. The creation followed suit. After the apple the only time the lion and lamb were together was when the lamb was on the menu. Human beings didn't fare any better. We learned to hate and hurt, and we got stuck with work. No one played nearly as much as God wanted.

So, God tried one more time, and God did it with a baby. God knew that almost no one could resist a baby. The Child came among us to give us back our humanity and to teach us to play again. Never forget that each moment of giggling and laughing is born in the heart of God who wants us to be as playful as we are with a baby.

The Child – like all babies – was also a study in peace. His Mother and Father must have spent countless hours watching him sleep. Holding the baby in their arms and knowing in the deepest part of them that arms were meant for affection and nurture – not to be filled with the tools of violence and death.

The Child's sleep was a sign of peace that could mark each moment if it was allowed. And for a moment – if only a moment – peace was in the world. "The little town of Bethlehem" was still.

This Baby was also a sign of hope as all babies are. There was going to be a tomorrow, and in the birth of this Child the tomorrows would be on their way toward God's future.

It was in God's mind that human beings could do better than they had been doing. The Child would show the way. Leading people in the search for their truest selves. Leading the lion and lamb in a grand parade into a "Peaceable Kingdom" even sweeter than all the 19<sup>th</sup> Century paintings by that title. Leading chosen ones to form communities of human beings who would know and would testify that hope was born into the world and hope would never leave the Creation or the creatures.

This Child was also what all babies are: love calling to love. No words were needed. The Child is God's Word which created all things in the beginning and continues to create in the lives of each and all. And the piece d' résistance of the Word is love which is stronger than hate – love which draws people to one another – love which is a magnet pulling everything inexorably back to God's heart. Love calling to love – in the Child who is the Word.

God chose to enter the world as a Baby so we wouldn't be scared half to death – only startled all the way back to life. But, this Baby's life – like any baby's life comes with challenges.

This Child no longer nurses at Mary's breast. What the Child needs is for those who know and love him to feed all the other children.

Martin Luther said that many who hear the Christmas story claim that they would gladly care for the Child. But, Luther reminded them, the measure of faithfulness is taken by how we are for the children among us.

I try not to think about the child who starves to death in a world which has more than enough capacity to provide food for everyone. But, Jesus' tears fall like rain on the earth. Each drop a reminder that the Child sorrows over the hungry ones. Jesus will not allow us to rest in the comfort of our piety

and sweet Christmas sentiments. This is not only a Hallmark moment. The tears of the Child are a call to responsibility for those who know and love Jesus

Of course this Child – like every baby – is meant to bring out the best in us. The Child’s birthday is a time to live into the vision God has of you. To see in the Child’s eyes a reflection of God’s great love for you. To see in the Child’s smile God’s own smile.

Some of the little ones in the parish do not receive the Holy Communion when the rest of the family gathers at the Table. My prayer is that that oversight is a temporary arrangement. In the meantime I whisper into the ear of each little one this great truth: “God smiles on you every minute of every day.”

I know that is doubly true on this night when the Child’s birth is remembered among us. It may not always feel that way, but never forget: your feelings don’t set God’s agenda. God smiles on you every minute of every day.

Naturally finances have to be re-arranged. This Child never needed braces and did not go to college. But, his teeth were often set on edge when he saw the great inequities between the rich and the poor. And though the

Child never studied economics at a university he knew Hebrew Scriptures and knew that God had planted in the hearts and minds of faithful women and men a vision of economic justice which never changed through the centuries and has not become less demanding because it is so universally ignored.

There is some worry for us. Are we the kind of people the Child needs. Can we allow the Child's vision to draw us and others to move in single steps and in great leaps toward the realm of God?

It is in us to do that. God provides everything we need to honor the Child and to care for all the children the Child loves so much. It is in you. As you celebrate the birth of the Child let what is in you form and shape the rest of you life.

“Every new born baby is a sign that God has not yet given up on the world.” There are blessings and challenges with every baby – even the Christmas Child. Enjoy this Child and discipline yourselves to make his birth a moment of birth for the best you are and the best you can become.