

Christmas Day
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
25 December 2020

What makes this birth so special? Is it the matter of the birth? NO! Women have been giving birth in unusual places from the beginning of creation. From rice farms and country plantations, to buses, airplanes, and trains. To have delivered a baby in a cave surrounded by animals was not as peculiar as we think. Was it the family of origin? No! The family is not special when it comes to what first century Palestinians consider special. Mary is not wealthy, does not come from a prestigious family, and is not particularly well educated. Joseph was not from the priestly family of the Levites and he was not particularly well known outside of his family and village. Many say, what makes the family special is that Joseph was a descendant of David, which fulfills the prophesy that the Messiah would be a descendant of the root of Jesse, the king's father. But there were many men who were descendants of David. Some more deserving than Joseph.

Are all the extraordinary events that took place during his birth that make this boy special? After all, how many births are announced by an eastern star? How many average newborn babies are visited by foreign dignitaries? How many births are announced by angels to shepherds in the fields? Well, in and of themselves, these events are only important when looked at with the eyes of faith. To one without faith, the visits from the shepherds and the magi can be explained as curiosity and only curiosity. These people saw a star and decided to follow it to see where it would lead. Nothing special about this. At some point during the journey, the shepherds found a homeless family in a cave and decided to pay their respects. The magi saw the star rest on a humble house. Upon entering the house, they saw a young family with a young child and decided to pay their respects by offering small gifts. Nothing significant here.

What makes this birth the most significant birth in human history is nothing more than the person born today. This baby is the most significant of all humans in the history of the universe. Not because this baby has a different type of humanity, but rather because in him the fullness of humanity is seen. This baby is humanity as God intended it to be: Innocent, sinless, dependent on God's love and provision, filled with perfect joy. This baby is special not because he is different from us, but because he is the fully perfect version of who God intended us to be. This baby is the Son of God, the Word who was from the beginning as John tells us today. He is God himself who has become flesh for the salvation of humanity. This baby is the most perfect sign that God will act in unexpected ways and will go to any extent to liberate his captive people. This baby breaks into our lives and changes everything. He makes all the difference.

From the beginning of Creation humans have pretended to know God's ways. They have attempted to know where God can be found. Many can tell with certainty who

belongs to him and who does not belong to him. From the beginning many have tried to control God, to possess God, to manage God as though God is a commodity whose grace can be leveraged, sold, purchased, or somehow negotiated. Many have sought to speak for God, promising unlimited prosperity to those who fund churches, build schools, and pay for television broadcasting stations. Many have sought to control God's forgiveness, claiming that only they have authority to reconcile sinners to God. Many have sought to market God, selling, and buying neon crosses that glow in the dark.

But whatever the church, or religious leader, who claims to speak for God, who attempts to control God, who is busy building walls of separation in God's name... I have news for them today. This baby changes everything! This baby makes all the difference in the world! He is the last word! He is the "complete refutation of every human system and institution that claims to control, possess and distribute God." This baby is the proof that God acts in unexpected ways, that he belongs to all, that he willingly takes on flesh to save all who come to him! This baby is a gift to the entire world, and no one has the right to claim him as exclusively theirs. This baby is the hope of the poor, the lost, the disenfranchised, the alone, and the outcast. This baby is the clearest sign that God is on the side of humanity and he empathizes with human suffering. He understands humanity's quest for truth and relevance. He knows of our thirst for eternity, and he seeks after those who search for truth.

Since the beginning of creation there have existed despots and tyrants. Some of them believe God is on their side. They believe their power is a divine gift they can use in any way they see fit because they see themselves as God's anointed ones. There are other despots and tyrants who feel free to subjugate and oppress others because they do not believe in divine justice. They do not believe there is a God who will hold them accountable for their depravity and their cruelty. I have news for both groups of tyrants and for all people around the world who oppress their brothers and sisters: This baby makes all the difference in the world. He stands as a sign against you. Your power is temporary. Your authority is ephemeral. You will be in power for only a season and then you will go the same way other tyrants have gone. You will be judged as other tyrants have been judged. God sees your depravity, and the baby born today stands in opposition to your sin. You will be held accountable.

Since the beginning of creation there have been lost people who refuse to be found. They march on from day to day, convinced that life is about them and the acquisition of wealth, fame, and popularity. They go day after day in stubborn denial of their sin, their brokenness, and their complacency. Many of them are doing quite well financially and many have all that it takes to be quite happy, yet there is a disquietude in their hearts that no amount of money can ever solve, there is an emptiness that no amount of fame can fill, there is a sense of purposelessness that no amount of self-exploration can

ever fix. To these people who choose their lostness I have good news. This baby changes everything, he is proof positive that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners. He wants to find you in your lostness. He wants to give you the joy and peace your life is missing. This baby is a sign that God is not against you, God is willing to go to any extent to save you. Today is the day to turn to him. This baby is good news for you!

This baby is good news for all of us as well. We who walk in the valley of the shadows of death; we who are assaulted by fears, doubts, nostalgia, and bitterness. We who from time to time lose hope and wonder what being a Christian is all about. We who worry about our families, our church, our community, and our country. We who from time to time become discouraged in our walk of faith and feel dried up and exhausted. This baby is good news for us. This baby tells us that God is in control and that all things will work out just fine for those who believe in God through his Son. This baby is proof positive that God has heard our cries and has sent a liberator to be on our side, to guide us the rest of the way, to give us strength at times of weakness, and to forgive us when we fail to live-up to his will for our lives. This baby is good news for us who are aging, who are ill, who are grieving! This baby tells us that God cares and that he loves us in indescribable ways!

Have courage! God sees our pain and through his son he will guide us back to him in due time. He is the hope of the hopeless and the strength of the weak. This baby is God's gift to us! I pray that we will accept this gift with boldness! Receive this gift with joy! God is on our side and with God on our side there is no battle too great, no challenge that cannot be conquered, and no fear that cannot be defeated. I pray you accept this boy with boldness, because only in him can we find peace, hope and joy. May this baby make all the difference in your life. I know he has made all the difference in my life. May the Christ child continue to bless you.

Merry Christmas, Amen!