

Christmas Day 2023
Luke 2:1-20
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace, peace, mercy, love, and Christmas blessings to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

[Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger. Let's pray: ...

She gave birth, wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger. The miracle of Christmas all sounds rather underwhelming the way St Luke records it, don't you think? It sounds like it could be any birth. I'd say it was like many births that happen throughout the world today. A newborn, something to wrap the little tyke in, and a makeshift crib. And yet, the angel called this birth, "Good news of great joy." So, what's so special about this child and what does he bring us? He can't walk or talk. He can't feed or care for himself. He can't really do much at all. However, despite all this, the angel declares this child to be our Saviour, our Messiah, our Lord. So, what's significant about this? Why would God choose to come down to us and enter the world as a newborn baby? What do we see in this child? What draws us to a manger in a stable in Bethlehem?

I want to begin unravelling this mystery by using ourselves as examples. What do you think your parents saw the very first time they gazed into your eyes? Imagine the hopes and dreams they held for you. Imagine the joy, happiness, and good things they wished for you. Imagine the potential and possibilities they saw in you. Imagine the life they wanted you to have. They saw beauty that has nothing to do with physical appearance. They saw holiness that has nothing to do with behaviour or being good. They saw a miracle, the fullness of God's life, contained in your little body. Just like what Jesus' mum, Mary, saw.

Most have experienced this to one degree or another. I want you to imagine you're looking at one of your baby pictures. Transport yourself back to the beginning. Do you see what your parents, nurses, doctor saw? It's all there: the dreams, the hopes, the possibilities, the potential, the beauty, the love, the innocence. That's you. If you struggle to see it in yourself then go back to that day you first looked into the face of your child or grandchild. I know you saw it

there. Recall the last baby you witnessed being baptised. It was there too. Think about a time you gazed into the face of a child you didn't even know and would probably never meet. Maybe it was a child on a playground or a baby being pushed in a pram at the supermarket. It was there too. Those anonymous faces revealed something oddly attractive, familiar, and recognisable.

Can you recall what that was like? Do you remember how watching those babies and seeing those faces affected you? Something caught and held your gaze. Did you feel re-energised; re-vitalised?

What do you think of that? Am I barking up a tree, or do you, like me, smile, coo, and become mellow around babies? What I'm talking about is much more than being a parent or grandparent; more than cuteness and sentimentality; more than memories of the past. And it's about much more than the baby. The great attraction and the reason we continue to look and are captivated by babies is because we're caught up in a vision far more expansive than what we're seeing. We're caught up in the midst of a revelation greater than the presence of a baby. In that moment that we're caught in a baby's gaze, we're being reminded of something we've forgotten. In that gaze, we've caught a glimpse of God become human. In that little face we're seeing Emmanuel, God with us. We're experiencing our truest and most authentic self. The fullness of our life is there and we're seeing all the possibilities of what might be. Held in that gaze, we experience the original beauty and holiness of our creation. That's why God came among us as a baby. And that's why we show up today; to gaze into the face of God's child and see our own reflection, his image, in whom we were created.

Please don't limit your thinking that Christmas is only about remembering or celebrating a one-time event - the birth of Jesus. Let's not limit Christmas to a celebration of what was. Let it reignite and re-energise our passion for a world of possibilities of what might be. Let this holy child's face show us the reality and truth of our own lives. In him we see all the goodness, love, holiness, beauty, and possibilities for life that we wish and want for ourselves. And it's all here. It's already here within us. So, what we see in Jesus somehow already exists in us. It's how we were created. It's what God desires for us.

In some deep way this baby, the Christ child, shows us who we are, who we can become, and what our life is really about. His birth offers us a new beginning.

Who among us here hasn't at some time or another wished, prayed, and struggled for a new beginning? Who among us hasn't wanted the chance to begin again? Not just to do different but to be different. Christmas is our festival of re-creation, a time of new beginnings.

When Jesus was born, he revealed the truth about humanity. Let's not hide.

In this Christ-child we see ourselves. Let's not turn away.

Jesus is the child of peace. Let's not be violent or anxious.

Jesus is the child of love. Let's not hate or be angry.

Jesus is the child of compassion. Let's not be indifferent.

Jesus is the child of gentleness. Let's not be harsh or hurtful.

Jesus is the child of joy. Let's not be sorrowful.

Today, we celebrate divinity being wrapped in humanity. Let's, ourselves, be wrapped in divinity.

Today, we behold the child of grace. Let's be filled with grace.

Today, a child is born to us. Let's claim our new beginning.

I'm curious. What will you do now? What will you do with the gift of a new beginning? Your life is before you and God's dreams for your life are deep and wide. So, go home, pull out your baby pictures, gaze into those beautiful eyes, see the Christ child, and remind yourself of who God created you to be – a wonderful, cherished, and beloved gift. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all human comprehension, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus, born this day that we may live. Amen.