

Christ Community Covenant Church
Christmas 2011: This changes everything!
Pastor Dave Scherrer - December 25, 2011

When did it flip for you? When did Christmas become not mostly about getting but mostly about giving? Can you remember specifically?

Were you ever the visitor at the delivery of a baby, not as the mother, but as a visitor? What were the circumstances and what was it like? What did you see and feel and wonder?

Emotion – fear, hope, uncertainty
 Physical pain
 Joy and relief
 Wonderment
 Miracle

The First Christmas is an interesting event to say the least. Let's just read the story one more time and you pick out some of the things that you find interesting:

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

This song last night said "This changes everything!" And I want to get after that just for a few minutes . . .

On the first flush this story is simply the story of a woman's labor and delivery of a baby. That's what was just described in the passage and . . . this is what we are celebrating . . . the simple birth of a child.

It's rather common, right?

Every year on this planet there are 130 million births:

- There will be over 15,000 babies born during this one hour that we spend in this service. That is a baby boy or a bouncing baby girl popping out every 4 seconds!
- That is one for each breath we take (let's try this breath in and out five times)
- So it is a pretty common thing and in that sense an ordinary event and yet each birth is unique, each event is a wonderment, each birth is a miracle.

I got to watch birth happen 3 times, 1st time was with the birth of our daughter Kristin in 1979 and the second with Heather in 1982. I was in the room, but a bit of a distant observer for the birth of Adria in September of 2008. In each of these I was very present and caught up in the moment but I have to say, not nearly as caught up in the moment as Susan was!

Kristin's birth was a bit less common -

I saw sweat and contortions, I heard groans and cries. I could see the overwhelmingly difficult thing it was to give birth – “like pushing a bowling ball through a keyhole”.

Still to see each of those slimy, red squirmy bodies appear, to see the tears of pain become tears of joy and relief . . . each are common but each are a miracle too. To go back to our theme, for the couple that has their first child, *how does it change everything?*

And then there is this birth of a child, 2000 years ago. And in a moment I am going to suggest that this birth was the most uncommon of a generally common expression of giving birth:

Luke 2:7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

To understand how this uncommon birth changes everything we have to look first and see how different this birth was:

From the Matthew passage we know that this birth was different from anything we have been through. This was not one of the lovely birthing suites at Good Samaritan, private, sterile, expert help, pain killing drugs . . . no, this was most likely in a limestone cave connected to a small area that was used as a unconnected garage, for storage of things and probably for some milk producing family goat. But that is just a small way that only has to do with the differences between a 21st century birth and a first century birth. But more was going on in this birth.

Here's how that birth was more than a bit different:

In this baby being born, this is the Eternal Creator stepping into created time. The All-Powerful Divine Son becoming a helpless baby birthed by Mary - a one time entry of God putting on the form of humanity:

This one birth of the **One Baby**.. in **one place**.. at **one time** represents also the re-birth of **everything, everywhere** and **for always and for anyone** who trusts that it is so.

Gal. 4:4

When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman...to buy freedom for us... so he could adopt us as his very own children.

When the Holy Spirit came upon Mary a seed was planted in her and in another mysterious way a seed was planted in the world too. Creation was re-created in that moment when the seed came into the egg of Mary.

There is a powerful picture in Romans 8 that speaks of this whole of creation being pregnant with all the pains of labor and groaning. Mary's pregnancy lasted the traditional 9 months. This earthly pregnancy has lasted a bit longer! We are in year 2012 almost.

Romans 8:18-24

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the

creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved.

You see since humanity got out of step with God in Genesis 3 we have been at war with God. We have been not so much wayward children but actual enemies with God. Rejecting him, ignoring him, despising him. Going on since the first humans chose to step out of harmony with God's will and way into the human chaos that lands us all into the condition of the condemned. We need a savior to help us! We groan looking for help to rescue us

During Susan's first long labor of almost 18 hours, Susan eventually looked at me between contractions and quietly said, "***I don't want to do this anymore.***" I remember thinking but not saying "***Sorry, this is a done deal, you just don't know it yet!***" Thankfully, that time I just looked at her with my best compassionate face and said nothing hoping my face said ***I am sorry it is so hard!***

There is something in us that senses that this pain in childbirth was not supposed to be this way. It is the Genesis 3 consequence of sinning against God in the Garden of Eden. I think God was sorry too. He wasn't putting these punishments on us out of revenge and spite. These were the natural consequence of our making life hard for us. Making life becomes hard!

But when the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, a seed was planted in her and in so doing a seed was planted in the world, frankly in all creation, that will some day give birth to a whole new created child. In a word it is what Jesus asked us to pray for when he taught us to pray:

"Thy Kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"

A New Kingdom that does only the will of the Father! That is what is slowly being born. For 2000 years we have been experiencing the gestation of a whole new created order - where an un-natural tendency to sin is replaced in our lives with the intended sinless nature of God's only Son.

Here is the deal . . . we cannot go back to God's original Garden of Eden. There is no mulligan for this sort of thing. We cannot change our own past or the unfair things that have happened in our lives. We cannot change our bad choices so that somehow they are all good. Our hopes and dreams no longer come with a warranty that our satisfaction will be guaranteed.

So we groan... or at least we hear the groans of others.

It's in our Christmas songs; "Long Lay World in Sin and Error... PINING" – longing in distress for something so intensely that we lose strength and say ***I don't want to do this anymore.***

Here is where our hope lies this morning: A mother to be can endure the pain of childbirth because she knows what is coming next; Life! Life abundant! A 6 pound bundle of joy.

So to push the analogy, if Creation now is in the pains of childbirth, knowing what is coming can give us courage and a steadfast heart in times of trial. What is being born is the Kingdom of God.

Friends because of that one birth at one time for all time, through the radical immersion of the One born into sin and suffering and death we have the promise of a new life and so with that, hope and peace with God. We have through the Holy Spirit now the very presence of God moment by moment to lead and to guide. We have finally Peace on Earth! We are no longer at war with God!

Paul calls creation's pregnancy that we are in, these childbirth pains the **freedom and glory** of all human creatures to be adopted as children of God!

It means that the frustration and fears from bad choices and unfair circumstances no longer have to hold us hostage. There is a new world coming, the Kingdom of God where all will do His perfect will and all will enjoy the sweet fruit of this new tree. The hope of something having been conceived and it is growing and it is coming and it is a done deal. Hold on, some day soon Jesus is coming back and in an instant everything will be changed. The Kingdom of God will be here in power not just Spirit. Are you ready? I am.

Prayer

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
 It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.
 Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
 Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
 A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
 For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
 Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
 O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
 O night, O Holy Night, O night divine! O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
 His law is love and His gospel is peace.
 Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
 And in his name all oppression shall cease.
 Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
 With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
 Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
 His power and glory ever more proclaim! His power and glory ever more proclaim!

Frederick Buechner says this about the incarnation:

"Those who believe in God can never, in a way, be sure of Him again. Once they have seen Him in a stable, they can never be sure where He will appear or to what lengths He will go, to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation He will descend in His wild pursuit of man. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant's child, then there is no place or time so lowly or earthbound but that holiness can be present there too. And this means that we are never safe, that there is no place that we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from His power to break in two and recreate the human heart because it is just where He seems most helpless that He is most strong, and just where we least expect Him that comes most fully."

Secrets in the Dark, a Life in Sermons