

Perhaps you've seen the saying: "Babies are God's way of saying that the world should go on." Tonight we come to hear through the birth of this child, the Christ child, that God says "yes" to our world. We yearn to hear the words that light will overshadow darkness, that in spite of all that may discourage us, there is within our world individual sparks of candlelight which when lit beside the light of others illuminates a path that even deep darkness cannot hide. We yearn to hear echoed in God's incarnation, in-creation through Christ, that God has determined that this world should go on, bringing forth life, offering hope even if that hope is audacious. It may seem like a miracle to us to hear again this story that God is birthing life into this very place in which we live, into our very lives; yet, this is what we come tonight hoping for, yearning to hear and believing. This is good news, glad tidings of great joy!

This sermon is going to be a simple three point message. First, tonight God through Christ says a resounding "yes" to us and to our world. Second, God through Christ shows us by Christ's message and the example of his life what God's dream for this world looks like. And third, we can join God and Christ in helping to make that dream come true. Let me take a few moments to elaborate these three points.

First, God through Christ says "yes" to you, to me, to us and to our world. Perhaps tonight you need to hear God say "yes" to you. This year, more than any others, I've been with folks who need to hear that God says "yes" to them. They are either very sick, lonely, lost loved ones, or have gone through difficult life transitions. They are unemployed, can't buy presents for their kids, and face 2008 with fear and trepidation. They feel "less than" and sick in soul and spirit. They need to know that God has not abandoned them; God in Christ is bringing the hope of new possibilities. One of the delights of new babies is knowing what we do not know. We do not know what awaits them, what they will become. We do know that within their tiny body's and souls there is a spark of the divine. Part of the joy and trial of parenting is seeing those possibilities unfold. God has possibilities for all of us and for our world. The possibilities never end! Tonight God says "yes" even if we fear the unknown.

The second point is that God through Christ shows us by Christ message and his whole being the dream God has for the world. It is a dream that is often counter-intuitive and so we need to be reminded by the story we hear tonight. The story of Jesus' birth is simple yet radical. We barely notice from our 21st century perspective that this story is God's way of telling people long ago and us tonight a new way of understanding God's dream for the creation God called "good". The message is a paradox to us: Jesus is born to an unwed, teenage mother with no social position, no prestige, no standing within the community. This story is not saying that those with good standing must be bad. But rather it gives dignity to those who need it most, worth to those who may feel worthless or whom society labels worthless. God's dream is a dream for all people.

The story makes these points: Mary and Joseph were desperately poor; yet, God can be born to the desperately poor. It was shepherds, those considered unclean, who were the first to first hear the heavenly angels declaring that their world should go on. The good news of glad tidings does not leave out those considered unclean in our world; it is good news for rich and poor, respectable and those considered not respectable; God's good news of love and hope is freely given. And it is magi, foreigners, from far off countries who have the sense to recognize that a special birth has occurred. These foreigners who have a different religion know that in Christ God's dream for the world is revealed. In the gospels we hear over and over that to

understand best God's incarnation one is usually on the margins of society. When people are stripped bare of all that we like to hide behind, they have clearer vision to dream dreams of God's realm.

Third, we can join God in Christ in making miracles happen! My friends who work in the helping professions are often worn out and discouraged. This year they face impossible odds to meet the needs of the poor, homeless, and distressed. This year some of my friends have traveled to distant countries and there they have seen firsthand that there are needs much greater than the ones experienced here in this country. Tonight we may come worn out and discouraged about all that is left to do; but we come and we hear that in spite of all the troubles, God says a resounding "yes" this world should go on, and God says it by birthing Christ into a time and place that was more destitute than our world today. So, if Jesus' world was blessed by God with the possibilities held within this baby; we too have hope that our world may be blessed by the same power of the universe that is pushing it towards wholeness and justice. We can take courage that our efforts become those of co-creators with the divine. We are midwives to God's blessings to be born. What we do does make a difference.

I watch with admiration at what many of you do in many different places, in big ways and small. You light your candles and as a result someone out there sees through the darkness a way out of no way. We are called to trust that the divine power of this universe can use our lights in ways we can't even imagine. We don't have to be the saviors of the world; but we can join God's movement to bring hope and salvation. It gives me hope to see your candles shine brightly in this community and even in far off places in our world. If I did not see or know your candles were lit out there, I could get easily discouraged. You join God in making miracles happen! And this is good news, glad tidings of great joy!

The other night Tom and I had our yearly viewing of Dickens, *The Christmas Carol*. If our world is lacking; Dickens world was much worse. When Dickens was 12 his father was taken to debtor's prison, and he was sent to work in a factory under very harsh conditions. These experiences which transported him from privilege to destitution informed his writings to come. At the time *The Christmas Carol* was written, Christmas as a holiday was waning in importance. But Dickens loved Christmas and needed money, and so he wrote *The Christmas Carol* in only six weeks. And you know the rest of the story.

In this story the only tangible gift given is the prize goose. The other gifts Scrooge gives are the gifts of restored relationships: of reconciliation with his nephew, Fred, the promise of friendship and a decent life to Bob and his family, and offerings of money to help the poor which though tangible were really gifts of restored relationships between Scrooge and his world. What really happens to Scrooge is that his eyes are open and he hears the glad tidings of great joy, he hears God say "yes" to his life going on into a transformed future. He hears that his visions are not those of what must be but what could be, and thus, he is given the gift of hope for a future unlike his past.

Tonight this babe reminds us that God says "yes" this world should indeed go on. Life and light will continue to be born perhaps even in unassuming and counter-intuitive ways. We hear that there is hope that any sorrow can be lessened by divine love and those that show divine love to others. We hear that God has not forsaken this world. We hear that our efforts to make ourselves safe and secure are ultimately found to be inadequate and so we trust in the love of the universe with whom we join our lives and light our candles so that all people will see the brightness of God's new dawn and all people will hear the glad tidings of great joy. God says "yes" to them! May it be so!