

The year 2010 has been a year of births for our faith family:



Lael Nouvel Lynn Bowlin



Chloe Alice Brady



John Allen Cantor



Noah Alan Craven

We've prayed for these children and their parents and after long anticipation, and we've celebrated their arrivals with great joy. Tonight is again a night of celebration for the birth of a child, the Christ Child. Though every child's birth is a miracle beyond description, in Christ we see an especially extraordinary miracle, the glory of God come to dwell in and on earth. I've always felt that the miracle of new life is the miracle of possibilities. We hold these precious, tiny ones not knowing how their lives will unfold but aware that their futures will hold many possibilities, and we have the joy of watching with wonder and awe as those possibilities are revealed.

Perhaps the importance of telling the story again each Christmas Eve is to remind us at least once each year that possibilities still exist. God holds many possibilities for you and me, and we haven't used them all up yet! Sometimes, with our tendency to look inward, we keenly feel our failings and failures. Sometimes we are disappointed with our lives as they are. We wonder why bad things happen to good people. We see the world as it falls short of being a safe and kind place to many. In such times, we may forget that in spite of everything we see to the contrary, there are still possibilities, and God is constantly in the world, working overtime to make new possibilities present themselves.

We need to remember to be present, to be aware, and to be ready when novelty and the creative, responsive love of God present opportunities to us. And such opportunities come to us in two ways: They come as 2nd chances (or 3rd or more chances) to us as individuals, and they come as opportunities for change and justice within societies.

Change is often difficult even when much desired. The births of each of our babies in this church has changed forever the lives of their parents and all who love them. Similarly, the birth of the Christ changed the world and still continues to change the world as his message and spirit

lives on. Yet, we humans sometimes get stuck and find it hard to accomplish change in our lives. I find change to be hard. Recently, someone shared a story with me, and I'd like to share it with you. It's called "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters" by Portia Nelson.

Chapter 1

I walked down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in.
I am lost...I am helpless.
It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place but it isn't my fault.
It still takes me a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there. I still fall in...it's a habit.
My eyes are open. I know where I am.
It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.

Jesus tells us there is ***another street to walk down***. There are new possibilities, new life, a new creation, not only on Christmas Eve, but every day. And these possibilities are not just for the rich and famous and privileged, but they are for unwed mothers like Mary; they are for out-cast field workers (like shepherds) watching sheep; they are for people who have only a stable in which to spend the night. During his short ministry as an itinerant preacher, Jesus repeats this message in one way or another: ***there is another street to walk down***. We don't have to be stuck in what ***has been*** because God's mercy, God's possibilities are offered anew every day.

Now remember I said that new birth, novelty, and possibilities come not only for individuals and also for societies and nations. Sometimes an individual's possibilities are limited by the powers and structures of the societies in which they live. Opportunities for many children are limited because of choices their parents make, or because of where they live, or whether they are rich or poor. Here is where we can help to bring possibilities for all God's creation. As we look long and hard at our society and carefully critique how we can improve it, we become co-creators with God in giving birth to possibilities. As we take joy in God's love for us, ***we become*** the angels who sing "glory to God in the highest and peace on earth." Through our generosity and working for change, ***we can shine our light high and bright*** so people can see that there's ***another street to walk down***. The birth of Jesus was life for the people of his time and life for people born latter in history. The birth of Jesus, his message and his life, said to everyone, but

especially the poor and despised, ***“you, too, are God’s beloved.”*** Dorothy Sayers says of Jesus, ***“He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile.”***

I used to tell a children’s lesson where I took a strand of Christmas lights and explained that if one bulb was removed, all the lights went out. The purpose was to say that just as every bulb was important, each of them was important. Lights like those strands are not made any more. Today if a bulb goes out, the other lights keep burning. But even then, the strand of lights as a whole is diminished. Each light is still important. Tonight we light our candles to remind us that Christ’s light and our lights can reveal new possibilities for us and for our world. Our hope in the meaning and power of Jesus’ birth is that the story is not over, the script is still being written, and we can join the creative love that constantly lures, invites, and prods us to new life even in a worn-out world.

Many ages after God created the heavens and the earth, when man and woman were formed in God’s own image, long after the great flood, when God set the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant, twenty-one centuries from the time of Abraham and Sarah, thirteen centuries after Moses led Israel to freedom, eleven centuries from the time of Ruth, a thousand years from the time of King David, in the year of the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad, in the forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus, a baby was born in the city of Bethlehem of Judea. He was born Jesus, ‘Yehoshua’, which means “God helps,” and tonight that child comes to us again, lighting the Way we should go and showing us that something new and good and beautiful awaits us.

So let us also light our lights and hold them high for those who need to perceive the possibilities, for those who feel stuck or overcome with despair. Let us shine our lights on the structures in our society who need to see themselves for what they are and be transformed. Let us light our lights and hold them high so that we may see another way, another road to walk down and behold with wonder the glory of new birth, new creation, and new possibilities -- for we are loved with a great love, a love that knows no beginning and no end. Let there be light!