

Christmas Eve
Early Service
December 24, 2015

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So there you have it. That is the Christmas story. It starts with an unpleasant winter journey for a couple when the woman is very pregnant and about to give birth at any time. Then the travelers cannot find lodgings and have to settle for a barn and sleep with the animals. There in the squalor the baby is born, and there is no place to put the baby. They look around and decide to put him in the wooden basket that holds hay for the cows to eat. Then some very grubby and smelly shepherds arrive. They say that an angel of the Lord came to them and told them the Messiah had just been born here in Bethlehem and they would find him lying in, of all places, a manger. Then, they claimed, they were surrounded by a whole crowd of heavenly beings all singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth!" A few days later three well-dressed but outlandish foreigners arrive saying they had followed a star from their homes in the east and were here to pay homage to the baby who was born to be King of the Jews.

This is the Christmas story. The Story of the Nativity, of the birth of Jesus. But it does not explain why it is so important. It will take the rest of Jesus life and beyond for the significance of this birth to be revealed. Here is why it is important: God made us to be people who could love God and love each other and love everything God had made. For us to love we had to be free, so God made us free and never ever forces us to do anything. But we did not love God or each other or the world as much or in the ways that would give us and God the fullest joy. So God decided to come down to this earth and live among us as a human being. This is called the Incarnation or "enfleshment." It is one of the two most important and unique ideas in our faith. This birth is the moment that God bridges the gap

between God and human beings. This is when earth and heaven are joined. Maybe it needs to be described in the words of a child. Here is John Shea's account of a child telling the story. It is called:

Sharon's Christmas Prayer

She was five,
sure of the facts,
and recited them
with slow solemnity
convinced every word
was revelation.

She said
They were so poor
they had only peanut butter and jelly sandwiches
to eat
and they went a long way from home
without getting lost. The lady rode
a donkey, the man walked, and the baby
was inside the lady.

They had to stay in a stable
with an ox and an ass (hee-hee)
but the Three Rich Men found them
because a star lit the roof
Shepherds came and you could
pet the sheep but not feed them.

Then the baby was borned.

And do you know who he was?

Her quarter eyes inflated

To silver dollars.

The baby was God.

And she jumped in the air
whirled round, dove into the sofa
and buried her head under the cushion
which is the only proper response
to the Good News of the Incarnation.

This is the Good Tidings of great joy. God became a human being so that we can all be close to God and live as we were made, as images of God. Amen.