

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Christmas + 1-C; 30 December 2018
St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster
(rev. 201812300808)

Something New is Born

In nomine...

I. Intro

Merry Christmas!

(We get to say that for another week, until the Feast of the Epiphany.)

A friend of mine has a brand new baby. I haven't gotten to hold her yet.

What is it about holding a baby that is so entrancing for many of us? I've never found babies to be especially attractive. They tend to be kind of funny looking, like a wrinkly pug or something. But I love holding them. Ever since my parents adopted a baby when I was about 12, there's nothing like holding a baby. I wonder if it is their vulnerability, their complete trust, their utter acceptance of the one holding them. At that time in my life, I was in need of some acceptance.

Older children, like toddlers get squirmy and wants to get down. These days when I try to pick up my children they yell and say "No! No! Put me down!" They don't think I'm strong enough to safely pick them up any more! But when they were babies, I loved to hold them.

II. Thesis

Christmas is the time when we remember that God became a baby. God became utterly vulnerable, dependent, trusting, and accepting. And God's character doesn't change. So in the Incarnation, we learn something important about God. We learn about God's vulnerability, dependence, trust, and acceptance.

Our evangelical friends will use phrases like "accepting Jesus into your heart." But the real miracle lies elsewhere. The message of the Bible is not about accepting Jesus into our hearts. It is about the fact that God has already accepted you into God's heart, and that the barriers that

lie between you and God, between you and your neighbors, between you and yourself, are all man-made. The message of the Bible, from start to finish, is a message of reconciliation.

Paul writes, “Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.” Paul, the good Jew, is talking about Torah, which had a wider meaning than just a list of rules. Torah was and is a way of life, a way of being, that leads to a particular end.

As Christians, we believe that end is found in Jesus Christ:

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.”

The law was and remains a gift. I don’t know about you, but I love structure, guidance, and reassurance along the way. When I want go get from point A to point B, I want a roadmap. And then I want street signs along the way to verify what I discerned from that map!

The spiritual life is not so simple as going from point A to point B, and so the maps are not so simple. What we have are more like trail guides that describe the things you’ll see along the way and how to recognize when you’ve achieved particular places or experiences others have encountered before you. That’s what the Bible is like, what the law is about, what the writings of the saints and the traditions of the church teach us. Some people embark upon the spiritual journey with little or no guidance from those who have gone before. I think God can work through that effort. Myself, I wouldn’t dream of studying physics without a firm grasp on Calculus or trumpet without the ability to read music. So I am grateful for, and receive as a gift, most of what Scripture, the church, and Christian tradition have left for me. We stand on the shoulders of giants.

III. Good News

And just as St. Thomas' is not a museum, so we as individuals are not primarily historians. That foundation is given to us not for the sake of indulging in nostalgia, but because we're going somewhere, we're doing something, we're meeting someone.

During this Christmas season we remember Jesus being born into the world, and we strive to prepare our own hearts to be places where Jesus will be born again. In baptism we ourselves are born anew into God's heart. Like a newborn's first days and weeks of life, the faith we practice is one of weakness, vulnerability, dependence, trust, and acceptance. We say a million times, "I don't know" and "I'm not sure" and, on our more positive days, "I wonder!" I wonder!

IV. Invitation

I'm a squirmy toddler in God's loving arms. I always want to get down, to assert my independence. What I'm reaching for is the contentment of the newborn. Contentment to be held, to be shaped, to be formed by the other who holds me and leads me into a new awareness of life.

There comes an age where children no longer want to cuddle. But then comes another season of renewed appreciation and a renewed closeness. So goes our journey with God, and so we are fed by the seasons of the church year.

May this new year see you carried in God's hands, as a cuddly newborn. You may not be the prettiest baby that ever lived, but that's OK, because God loves you as only God could.

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