

Open Your Eyes to God

Luke 2:1-20

by the Rev. Dr. E. Scott Jones
First Central Congregational UCC
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What if it were to happen again? What if it happened this way?

At the Village Inn on Saddle Creek works a young girl. She lied about her age on her application, because she's really fifteen. Her name is Mary. Just so the story will be picked up for a Lifetime Television movie, let's make her a runaway and the child of Sudanese immigrants. She's living on her own, making ends meet, and working a couple of other odd jobs on the side.

One day Mary's gets sick, and it doesn't go away after a few days. One of the older waitresses asks, "Are you pregnant?" Mary's surprised by the question, but goes to Walgreens and gets a pregnancy test. Sure enough, it turns blue.

A few months later Mary's unable to work anymore and can't imagine how she's going to make ends meet and give birth to this child. A couple of her regular customers have taken a liking to Mary, and they decide to let her move in during her pregnancy. These customers are named Ron and Steve.

Well, it's getting along about Christmastime and Ron and Steve decide to take Mary with them on their trip home to Denver. While traveling I-80, their car breaks down east of Kearney in the middle of the worst blizzard in memory. They all huddle in the car trying their best to keep warm.

After a while, a big eighteen wheeler pulls up. The driver gets out with his flashlight and walks back. Ron rolls down the window and the truck driver asks, "Ya'll need any help?"

The driver's name is Bubba. He invites everyone to get in the rig and he'll drive them on to the next stop. As everyone piles out of the car and makes their way to the truck, Bubba isn't sure what to make of this motley crew.

When they all get in the cab, they meet Spike, who is Bubba's pit bull. (After all, we do need an animal in this story.) Spikes takes a liking to Mary and nuzzles up next to her. As they head off down the road, Mary groans and Spike starts barking. Mary's water broke. The baby's coming pretty soon.

After about five miles of slow going in the blizzard, behold!, they see a star up ahead. Then, they realize it's the lights of a truck stop – a Texaco. Bubba pulls in and runs inside for help. Someone calls 911, but with this blizzard, the ambulance isn't going to be getting there anytime soon.

The woman behind the counter is named Helen; she decides to go out and see for herself what's going on. When she climbs up in the cab, she realizes that the time is now.

So, with the help of Helen, two distraught gay guys, and a pretty disoriented Bubba, Mary has her baby. Everyone is crying for joy. The radio is playing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." And the folks holed up in the truck stop because of the storm, all chip in and buy Mary a few gifts out of the souvenir gift shop. The little baby gets wrapped up in a Nebraska

Cornhuskers commemorative throw.

Christmas is simply astonishing. We've been asking ourselves how to prepare for an encounter with God, and quite frankly, nothing prepares us for this astonishing story.

I stand here as a minister of the Christian faith. Ordained to carry out the ministry of word and sacrament. And every year I must encounter this story and make something out of it. Some proclamation of the *word of God*.

And isn't that astonishing as well? That little old me is supposed to "proclaim the word of God." A boy from Miami, Oklahoma. Surely among the least of the cities of Judah.

But this is how God works.

God's historical incarnation was in the pregnancy of an unwed teenage mother whose child was born in a cattle shed in some minor town in the Middle East occupied by a foreign power. Just think through that a moment. And let it astound you.

Then let this sink in. We, over two thousand years later, think that the truth of the universe, the meaning of our lives, the fulfillment of our hopes and dreams, what it means to be a human being, is embodied in this child born of a teenage mother in a cattle shed in some minor town in the Middle East occupied by a foreign power. We look at this child and we see the clearest revelation of what we mean by God.

But then, this Yahweh, God of Hebrews, was always something of a queer duck. The people whom God chose to save the world were slaves and nomads. God spent a lot of time worrying about widows, orphans, and poor people. God cared more for humility than for success. In fact, God didn't look too well on folk who thought they could make it on their own.

Pretty fitting, then, that God would take the route of a child born of a teenage mother in a cattle shed in some minor town in the Middle East occupied by a foreign power.

Seems to be making a point even in being born, doesn't he.

And in case the point is missed, this child grows up and then does things like party with prostitutes and tax collectors, touch the unclean, include the mentally ill, see common fishermen and imagine them as world changers, and then go willingly to the most horrible death imaginable.

But, still, lots of folk seem to miss the point. I don't know how more obvious it could have been.

Maybe God should try again. Maybe this time God could be born in the back of a tractor trailer in Kearney, Nebraska to an unwed immigrant girl in the middle of an ice storm with a gas station attendant acting as midwife. Maybe then everyone would get the point.

One can dream.

So, unless the fullness of time rolls around again, I guess we'll just keep gathering every year and telling this story until everyone gets it. The story where a teenage girl gives birth to God in a cattle shed in some minor town in the Middle East occupied by a foreign power. And angels appear singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill to all."