

## Christmas Eve 2011

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Luke 2:1-20

It is without a doubt the most famous story ever told – rehearsed for 2,000-plus years, around the globe, to people of nearly every nation, language and color. It captures our attention – when we pause long enough to listen, and take it in.

It is a story that has been reenacted on stage, the big screen, in church basements and in barns on Bollinger Road! It has been performed by famous actors, fully orchestrated with special effects. And by preschoolers, dressed in bathrobes with dish towels on their heads.

Perhaps the reason why we have seen and heard this account so many times, done in so many ways, is that none of us would have ever come up with a story like his.

Think of it... an inter-galactic war is being waged against the forces of evil. The mission is to bring deliverance to a people who have become enslaved, by powers both natural and supernatural; and to establish peace on earth.

And we are going to do this by sending in... a baby? A baby, born to a no-name teenager, put in an animal food trough, in what Luther called a “dung heap” of a town.

I can see the look on the face of Michael the Archangel – now, this isn't one of those chubby, cuddly angels that we see on Valentine's Day Cards or put on our window sills.

I'm talking the warrior-angels... the big-muscle ones with the tight abs! *“How about a show of force?” Let's really get their attention! An air-strike, maybe? Lasers? Can we at least use lasers?”*

But the motivation for this battle was not vengeance, or retribution or even greed or to feed someone's ego, like it was for Caesar Augustus when he established “Pax Romana”.

No, the motive behind this battle is love... so a baby would do just fine.

*“God's love... revealed to us...  
by sending his only son into the world. “*

That is the way love often comes to us. Real love, anyway.

Not in some dramatic display of power or might or wealth. Not even in expensive gifts. But in humble, quiet, innocent ways. Like a baby, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Yet there was grandeur! There was brilliance!

A whole bunch of angels showed up in blazing light and held a worship service... more like an ol' time revival!

As Martin Luther described it: *“The joy was so great that the angels could not stay in heaven, but had to break out and tell someone on earth.”* So, they came, proclaiming *“tidings of great joy”*.

But even that wasn't done at Jerusalem's version of the Kennedy Center, or Carnegie Hall with chauffeur-driven bigwigs in tuxedos and fashionable evening gowns decked out in jewelry.

This was an open-air concert in the country for a few guys who were just doing their job that night watching their sheep. Uneducated, minimum-wage sheep watchers, who spend most of their time... well, with sheep!

They were the ones that this great, history-changing message was entrusted to.

*"To you is born, this day in the City of David, a Savior,  
who is the Messiah, the Lord."*

*Deliverer? Master? Anointed King? - Baby? Bethlehem? Manger?*

It only adds up in the mind of a God who loves us so much that he would sacrifice his Son so that you and I might be free from our sin and guilt that has alienated us, and to reunite us to himself and to one another. Sent so that we might know life as it was meant to be lived... everlasting, abundant and free!

I picture Mary, the mother of this child. Taking it all in, trying to make sense of it all. Holding it dear, deep within herself as only a mother could. She may not have had it all figured out at this point. *Who could?*

Yet I'm confident that she understood something that every mother knows: Love and sacrifice.

In this, she knows the very heart of God... and the meaning behind all that was going on.

In the same way we enter the story tonight. Not with bathrobes and dishtowels but as we experience the heart of God... and start to share it with one another.

*"For if we love one another, God lives within us" writes St. John, "and His love becomes complete in us." (1 John 4:12)*