

Like a Child

Luke 2

Christmas Eve 2009

5:00 p.m.

- † The story of the Nativity, the birth of Jesus in a little town 2000 years ago, has inspired the greatest art the human race has ever produced. A visit to any art museum testifies to this fact.
- † Artists of the Italian Renaissance painted the scene over and over, gorgeously. Mary is almost always in blue, Joseph serenely keeping watch, the sky alive with shimmering angels, and in the center, the newborn babe.
- † The nativity has inspired high art and reenactments, dramatizations, grand and elaborate, and common and simple—ever since. What would Christmas be without the children’s Christmas pageant?
- † Whether it’s the classic *Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, by Barbara Robinson, or our own sweet pageant here tonight, we love to portray the story again and again. Why?
- † Because these pageants remind us that the story is meant to include us—ordinary people like Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wisemen, the innkeeper. Even the angels suspiciously look like someone you know. It’s not only in famous paintings that the story unfolds, but in our lives and our homes, too.
- † In addition to the pageants, we remember the story in nativity scenes or crèches made from finest glass, soft olive wood, and shown through cultures of every color and race; in front of our homes, on the church lawn, on the coffee table.

- † A couple of years ago, my family who is from Chicago sent me an article from the *Tribune* that is meant to be included in a sermon. Its headline read: “32 Jesuses Found in a Yard...Statues taken from outdoor crèches are being reclaimed at St. Symphorosa.”
- † Someone took thirty-two baby Jesuses from their mangers in crèches in front yards of a South Side neighborhood and deposited all 32 in the yard of a woman, who was so upset by the whole thing that she wants to remain anonymous. She took all 32 to her church, where neighbors were reclaiming them.
- † The church’s religious education director sympathized: “No one usually wakes up to 32 Jesuses in the backyard.” Rather than keep them as material evidence, police allowed the church to return them to their owners.
- † Police spokesman Patrick Camden got off the best line of all: “Baby Jesus belongs in a nativity scene, not in the evidence and recovered property room at the police station.”
- † Isn’t that the truth? For the four Sundays of Advent, the baby Jesus has been missing from our nativity scene here at church. But he has arrived right on time tonight. The children have been noticing his absence and are glad he made it.
- † It’s good to know that many of our children have nativities at home, and they have been moving the figures around since Advent began and acting out the parts of the various characters.
- † I have been collecting reports of the children’s efforts for a month now. One mom informed me that her two little ones, one four years old, the other two, each received a nativity from their grandmother. While the children played with the new crèches, the mom remarked

enthusiastically that each had their own set, each with their own baby Jesus.

- † The mom received a withering look from her oldest child, who said, “No, there is only one baby Jesus, and I have him.” “Oh,” said the mom, “then who is that one?” And her eldest replied, “He’s that other baby, you know, John the Baptist!” Good job, Sunday school teachers!
- † Older children have a lot to teach their brothers and sisters about the nativity, apparently. Another mother reports that her daughter, the eldest, told her younger brother, “When baby Jesus was born, there were three wise men that brought him gifts.
- † The first gift was a coconut, the second was honey, and the third was chocolate milk—pink chocolate milk!” Now that is an imagination at work, or perhaps wishful thinking.
- † Then there was the younger sister who asked her older brother, “Do you want to play Mary and Joseph?” Her brother, already occupied with his own play, said firmly, “No.” “Okay,” said the younger sister, “Then can I be your cat?” “Sure,” said the brother, “Now go to your room.” Hmmm.
- † We do sometimes get too busy to appreciate the Christmas story, even when we’re younger. But we need to hear it again and again. It is so simple, in a way. We believe the story because it rings true. It contains ultimate truth about ourselves and about God.
- † Because anybody could find themselves in a predicament like Mary and Joseph’s. At one point we all end up in unexpected situations, not sure what to do next. Anybody could be and everybody is, at one time

or another, uncertain and afraid of what the future will bring—for the world, for our nation, for ourselves.

- † Anyone could be and everyone of us is, in some way, on a journey, a sometimes long and difficult journey into an unknown future. It's a story about real people—about you and me.
- † And it is a story about God, a story of God coming into the world—not in the way anyone expected, not with chariots and trumpets, but quietly, simply. “It is a story that makes the most amazing suggestion: that God loves the world so much, loves the people of the world, each and every one of them—loves you and me—enough to become vulnerable, to become like us, to love us by being with us, born like us, living in the world like us, laughing and loving and hoping and dreaming like us, and finally, incredibly, dying like us.”
- † Which brings us to one final story from one of our children: a mother and her five-year-old son were visiting an adult friend when she received news that a family member had unexpectedly died. The friend was understandably grief-stricken and upset, which greatly troubled the child.
- † Riding home in the car, the child questioned the mother intently about what happens when you die. When the mother explained that the person who died would not be able to come back, just like the family cats who had died had not returned to life, the child replied:
 - † “Well, then somebody forget to tell that to Jesus, cause He did come back, and I'm glad.”
- † And so are we. For we remember that Jesus teaches us that even violence and death cannot defeat the love of God for us. This is the joy that we receive this night.

† O Night Divine, O Night when Christ was born! Won't you take your place in the Christmas story?

† Amen.

Source:

John Buchanan, Christmas Eve Sermon, December 24, 2006;

<http://fourthchurch.org>