

## Children of God, Christmas 1

Advent is over, the waiting is over, Christmas is here. We have been waiting for Christ to arrive and now Christ is here! What's the different between the version we had before that arrival and the one we have now? I think that may be one of the most important issues for us in this time. What version do we see Christ in?

We look at the manger scene and we tend to forget that Jesus was a baby. The baby Jesus did all the things babies do. And not only that, as another commentator said, we can be sure that the stable the baby was born in did not in any way mirror the Hallmark versions we see, you know – fresh clean straw, a crib-like manger, freshly groomed animals who are perfectly still and quiet and almost worshipping this new arrival, musicians playing harps nearby.

To the contrary, we can envision, and it is much easier for us to envision these days, those first few days stuck on the backside of nowhere, Mary and Joseph, hard pressed to regard their newborn son, whom they were trying to make happy and kept fed and clean, as anything other than human.

You have to wonder if they wouldn't have agreed with Mark Twain's observation that "a soiled baby, with a neglected nose, cannot conscientiously be regarded as a thing of beauty." (Lectionary Homiletics, Advent, Year A)

That other version, the Hallmark version, is the abstract version of the story. It is another matter altogether when we put names and faces into the picture. The Hallmark setting helps us escape the reality that the savior of the world came to us in abject

poverty, not only with no material possessions, but also as an infant, completely at the mercy of the world around him.

We can let the consumerism of Christmas carry us away into a fairy tale version of Christ that leaves us with a baby that was a baby for one night, and not an infant born into a hostile world with nothing except ordinary loving parents to guide him through an extraordinary life. It's like he was born and then became an adult instantly. But rest assured it did not happen that way. Jesus grew up like every child. It does my faith no harm to believe that he probably lived through all the moral experience in his life. You see, this child, this Christ child is our child.

There is a story that Jim Wallis tells of a reporter in the middle of the Sarejevo crisis who sees a little girl get shot by sniper fire. The reporter threw down his pad and pencil, and stopped being a reporter for a few minutes. He rushed to the man who was holding the child, and helped them both into his car. As the reporter stepped on the accelerator, racing to the hospital, the man holding the bleeding child said, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still alive."

A moment or two later, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still breathing." A moment later, "Hurry, my friend, my child is still warm." and then finally, "Hurry. Oh, My God, my child is getting cold."

The little girl had died by the time they made it to the hospital. As the two men washed the blood off their hands in the lavatory, the man turned to the reporter and said, "This is a terrible task for me. I must now go and tell her father that his child is dead." The reporter was stunned and said, "I thought she was your child." The man

looked back and said, “Well, I’m not her father, but this child is my child, they are all our children” (from: Who Speaks for God?, by Jim Wallis, Delecorte Press, 1996)

That is what John is saying in chapter one. It is an abstract passage which boils down to this, Jesus came to be one of us, to live with us, to live like us, to become our child and to make it clear that all children, young and old, are our children.

That is what happens when we baptize an infant. The parents give their child away, they recognize that she or he is not just their child and we see that she or he is in fact, our child. When we answer that question, “People of God, do you promise to support and pray for these people in their new life in Christ?” they are not just words that get us to the next place in the service. They are words that remind us that we are forever connected, they remind us of a cow shed many years ago where in the most despicable situation a child, our child, was born and where Mary and Joseph, acting on the world’s behalf set out on the journey of raising our child.

It reminds us, as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, that we are no longer slaves but children of God, and if God’s children then also heirs. It reminds us that all children, are our children.

Seeing God and encountering the Christ child is as far away and as close as the eyes of that person, that child, that is sitting next to you right now. In those eyes, if looked at deep enough, you will see the family resemblance which reveals that we are all children, God’s children, and that every child is our child. Amen.