

"Can a baby make a difference?"

Matthew 1:18-25

December 19, 2004

I suppose that we have all heard the stories of kids putting on the Christmas story - especially when it comes to the encounter between the inn keeper and Joseph and Mary. This one was a new one to me. In the grade school class that was doing the production there was one little boy who wanted very much to be Joseph. But when the parts were handed out, his biggest rival was given that part, and he was assigned to be the inn keeper instead. He was really bitter about this. So during all the rehearsals he kept plotting in his mind what he might do the night of performance to get even with his rival who was Joseph. Finally, the night of the performance, Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the inn-keeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted. Joseph answered, "We'd like to have a room for the night." Suddenly the inn-keeper threw the door open wide and said, "Great, come on in and I'll give you the best room in the house." For a few seconds poor little Joseph didn't know what to do, and a long silence ensued. Finally though, thinking quickly on his feet, Joseph looked in past the inn-keeper, first to the left and then to the right and said, "No wife of mine is going to stay in a dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn." And once again the play was back on course.

It is a great story - this story of the birth of a baby. It has been told in so many different ways and we have heard it so many different times that we know how the story is supposed to go. We know what every character did and is supposed to have said - even if it is not in the Bible. We know the story so well - and we know that around the world the story is also known. It is known so widely and has been told so long that we know it must be a big deal. Amazingly, Matthew does not make a big deal of it. As he tells the story, there are some tense moments leading up to the birth - - - but then it almost seems like this birth is just another baby being born. No big deal.

Does the birth of a baby make a difference? Is it a big deal? Ask any mother or father here and I am willing to bet that the answer will always be the same. Yes it is a big deal! The coming of a baby will change a person's life forever. But we are talking about a different scale all together. Can it be possible that the birth of one baby can make a difference to the whole world - to all of life. - - - - The birth of one baby named Jesus certainly seems to have done just that. It seems to me that it is far beyond reason - far beyond rational human comprehension - - - but the birth of one baby that Matthew reports so casually has done just that. That one birth changed the world.

We live in a time when the name of Jesus and all things Christian raise all kinds of emotions. It seems as though it has become politically incorrect to even use the name "Christmas" to refer to the upcoming holiday. Instead of "Merry Christmas", the more proper greeting is "Happy Holidays". It is a time when legal action is taken to remove God from the public view - whether it be Nativity scenes, massive carvings of the Ten Commandments, or "One Nation, under God". At the same time, this past week has seen the cover articles of such widely distributed magazines as Newsweek, Time and Life all dealing with the birth of Jesus and the Christmas story. They may not be the most "faith filled" or inspiring articles but

Jesus still made the cover! For many through the centuries the birth of that one child has shaped their lives in positive ways as they lived by faith. For many others the name of Jesus has led to division and hostility. Still others refuse to get too close for fear of what that one child may do to their lives. Can the birth of a child make a difference to the whole world? The birth of Jesus did.

I enjoyed reading about an old pioneer who was traveling westward across the southern part of our country until one day when he came to an abrupt halt at the edge of the Grand Canyon. He stared, unbelieving at the sight before him: a vast chasm one mile down, eighteen miles across, and more than a hundred miles long! He gasped, "Something musta happened here!" When we come to Christmas, no matter how some may want to try to take Christ out of the holiday, anyone, seeing the lights, the decorations, the trees, the music, the shopping, and the religious services, would have to say, "Something must have happened here!" And it was something that changed the world. God came. God is with us!

Matthew's Gospel tells it so 'matter-of-fact'-ly. A son was born to Mary and Joseph and named Jesus. Luke records it with more 'pomp and splendor' - angels sing, Inn keepers get into the act, shepherds rush in, swaddling clothes and manglers become elements of the story. And magazines like "Newsweek" analyze the details of the story - and I suspect that the story could be analyzed and re-analyzed until the end of time. Or I suppose that we could just try to ignore the story and that birth. We could even try to deny it all together. But the fact is that it is like standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon and trying to suggest that nothing happened there. Something did happen here - a baby was born - God is with us.

What difference does it make in your life that that baby was born? What difference does it make to you that God comes to be with us? Some are like loving parents that welcome the baby into their home and allow their lives to be reshaped around the baby. Others seem to stand a generation back and act more like grandparents - loving the baby, wanting to spend time with it, yet somehow a little glad that mom and dad come to take that baby home. Others are more distant relatives and are glad for an occasional encounter - and even like sending an annual birthday card. Still others noticed the birth announcement in the paper but rushed on to the other news.

Look around. Somethin' musta happened here! A baby was born. God is with us. And it is not about 3:00 AM feedings or mandatory care giving. This baby came to change the world. This baby came to change you. This baby came with the proclamation of "Peace on earth, goo will toward all!" Will you welcome this baby this year?.

AMEN