

**Feast of the Birth of our Lord**  
**Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX**  
**24 December 2023**

**Luke 2:1-14**

This has been a hard year for the world. The bloody war in Ukraine and the inhumane conflict in Palestine are just reminders of the darkness in which the world finds itself now. When we add to this the multiple natural disasters around the globe, the mass migrations of people running away for their lives in Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Latin America, and the political polarization in our own country, many become hopeless. We ask, "Where is God in all this?" All we see is inhumanity and pain. The world is experiencing another Habakkuk moment. The prophet asks God why tyrants seem to be winning and the world seems to be on the brink of extinction. We feel abandoned by God and alone in the universe. If only God were to act now! If only we could see signs that God cares!

We are all looking for signs that God is real and that what Holy Scripture says is true. We want to see God face to face. Some say, "If only I could get a real sign, an apparition of some kind, I would believe." We are looking for signs everywhere and when we hear that a messenger of God has appeared somewhere, we flock to the site, we go on pilgrimage, we pray earnestly that we too might see the signs. We want confirmation that God exists and that God cares. We want to know for sure that God's promises will come to pass. A life of faith is a hard life, for many people a life of absolute trust in things they cannot see is a hard life, especially in the midst of so much chaos. Certainty brings comfort, order and predictability. If only we could be certain that God is still interested in our welfare!

Many of us only believe what we can experience: see, smell, touch. If I tell you there is a great lake in the town of Conroe, you will believe me, because many of you have seen it, some have fished in it, others have taken boats on it. No matter what time of the day or night you go to that location, you will always find that lake there. But, if I tell you that God will personally come into this building tonight, you most likely will wonder if I have lost my mind. You will want to see proof, a sign that what I am talking about is true. You might say what Thomas said after the resurrection, "Unless I see, I will not believe." To walk by faith and not by sight is a difficult task at times of darkness. We all admire folks who have great faith, but many of us still harbor doubts in our hearts. Many of us still wonder, "What if there is nothing out there when I die? What if this Jesus character is nothing more than a nice story meant to make us more moral and less selfish? What if this 'God with us' is just a nice idea meant to keep children happy during the holidays?"

God has given us signs since the beginning of creation. God is the rainbow promised to Noah, and the entire natural world speaks of God's beauty and love for us. God is the Divine presence that entered into covenant with Abraham and his children in antiquity. God is the loving father who heard the cries of his people in Egypt and sent Moses on his rescue mission. God is the giver of the Law and the protector of the nation as they walked to the Promised Land. God is the eternal communicator who guided his people through the ministry of the prophets, and announced that God himself would come to our world to liberate the world from the chains that keep us bound. God is the incarnate Word who is born today in a humble stable and who remains with us to the end of the ages. We have had signs of God's presence among us in every generation. The problem is that we have closed the eyes and ears of our faith and no longer see God among us.

Today, some surprised and incredulous shepherds are given a sign. The angels say to them, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." The shepherds are given the sign to end all signs. This sign is none other than God himself who has chosen to become human. This child has come to institute a new Covenant in his blood. To fulfill all other Covenants and promises, to answer all questions about God, and to become the answer to all questions yet to come about God. This small and fragile child is God's answer to the problem of evil, he is God's solution for the brokenness and lostness of humanity. This small and vulnerable child is the remedy to the political tyranny of the world. He is the only hope for all who are subjugated and abused for the sake of profit, power, and political expediency. He is the proof those who believe God has abandoned them need. He is a God who cares, a God on our side.

The child given as a sign today is the Immanuel, the God with us. If anyone needs a sign that God is real and relevant, and still cares for humanity, all they need to do is look into the manger scene today. God has taken on flesh, has become human, has chosen to come to where we are, so that one day we may be where God is. This is the greatest story ever told. God breaks into our human world to be on the side of humanity. This is the greatest rescue mission in the history of the world, for this child will grow to be the Savior. This child will grow to be the way, the truth, and the life. This child will grow to be the light that shines in the darkness of this world and in the darkness of the human heart. This child is the liberator of those who remain oppressed. This child is the only hope left to humanity.

Today, God looks at each of us and asks, "Do you want a sign that I am real, that I love you, and that I want to have a relationship with you? Just look at the child in the manger scene. This is my gift for you. This is my promise to you. He is the salvation I offer you. He is the one promised from the beginning of time. He is

the one who has always been and will forever be for you. Look, I have come down to be with you and now the dwelling of God is among mortals.”

Sadly, many in this world have no use for this child. Many purposely walk away from a relationship with this child because of anger against other Christians or because they perceive the Church and her ministers to be hypocritical and judgmental. Others have a lukewarm relationship with this child and may even resent having to come to Christmas and Easter services. Some have walked away from the faith of their childhood and have a hard time thinking of God as relevant in their life. I want to point back to this manger and to this child. God’s love is manifested for us in a small and vulnerable child. God is not the merciless judge whose job it is to catch us doing something wrong. The God of endless rules and endless requirements many of us knew in childhood is not the God of the manger scene. This child is not just for the elite, the perfect ones, the righteous ones, the religious ones. This child is for all of us and his love cannot be reduced to a tribalistic reward for those who belong. This child wants a relationship with you because he empathizes with your vulnerabilities, your frailties, and your pain. He knows you better than you know yourself but he is not repelled by you. Just the opposite, he longs for a relationship with you. Nothing will give God more joy than to be invited to come into your life and into your heart.

Today is the day to open your eyes to recognize God next to you, as a friend and not a stranger. Look into this manger today and find God’s love for you in the form of a sleeping child. God could have chosen another way, another sign, perhaps another law with more rules, regulations and punishments. Instead, God chose to become the sign we need. This child is a sign that God is real and relevant. Today God looks at us and asks us, “Do you want to know how much I love you? ‘This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ Look at him and you will realize that my love for you has no limits.”

I pray today is the day you accept God’s invitation and love. Merry Christmas!