

The Birth of our Lord Jesus
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
24 December 2025
Luke 2:1–20

We live in a world saturated with news. We wake up to it, fall asleep to it, scroll through it, argue about it, and are often exhausted by it. Every source claims to be telling us the truth, and yet we are surrounded by noise, exaggeration, half-truths, and fear disguised as information. If it bleeds, it leads. Bad news sells. And if we're honest, most days it feels as if the darkness has the microphone.

It certainly feels that way this year. War continues to devastate entire regions of the world. Innocent people are displaced, buried, or forgotten. Political polarization has hardened the hearts of many people. Compassion feels rationed in very small quantities. Cynicism is fashionable and welcome in many political circles. Many feel abandoned, overwhelmed, or numb. And somewhere in the background of all of it, a question quietly lingers: Where is God in all this?

That question is not new. The people of Israel asked the same question while living under foreign occupation. The prophets asked it while watching injustice thrive. Habakkuk asked it as tyrants seemed to win and the innocent suffered unspeakable horrors. And tonight, many people ask it again, often quietly, sometimes angrily, and sometimes with tears. "If only God would give us a sign," we say. "If only God would act in our midst!"

And God responds, not with thunder, not with armies, not with spectacle, but with a child. The angel says to the shepherds, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." A child. Not a strategy for a better tomorrow. Not a new system of ethical principles to live by. Not a law that forces people to be civil and compassionate. A child. That is God's answer to the darkness of the world.

We remember the birth of this child because of the fascinating stories of Christmas. But, if we are honest, there is nothing particularly unusual about the circumstances of this birth. Women have given birth in far stranger places throughout history: on farms, in fields, on boats, on trains, on airplanes, and under circumstances far more dangerous than a stable. Poverty, by itself, does not make this birth unique. Neither does the family's social status. Mary and Joseph are not powerful, wealthy, or well-connected. Joseph happens to be a descendant of David, but so were many others. Nothing about this birth screams "special" by human standards. What makes this birth the most significant event in human history is not how the child is born, but who the child is.

This child is the fulfillment of a promise whispered at the dawn of creation, that evil would not have the final word. This child is the descendant of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed. This child is the prophet promised to Moses, the king promised to David, the righteous ruler announced by Jeremiah, the child of Isaiah upon whose shoulders authority would rest. This child is the suffering servant who would bear humanity's wounds. This child is the Word who was with God and was God, and who took on humanity at the right time in history.

God does not send an explanation for the problem of evil in the world. God sends himself. And he does so quietly. There are no palaces involved. No religious authorities who show up. No temple delegation making a visit. No political dignitaries. No crowds. No headlines. Life goes on as usual. People sleep unaware of what is happening in Bethlehem. Empires continue to operate as they always have. History seems to unfold unchanged. Except nothing is the same. While the world is busy doing what it always has done, a small cry in the night announces that everything has changed. God has entered the story of the world, choosing humanity, choosing to become vulnerable and fragile. And the first people invited to witness this great sign are shepherds working at night in the fields.

We have romanticized shepherds over the centuries. We picture clean robes and peaceful hills. But real shepherds were none of those things. They were socially ostracized, religiously impure, excluded from court testimony, and often unable to participate in temple worship. They lived outdoors, smelled like animals, and were regarded as unreliable. And God says, "You will do." Not the powerful. Not the respectable. Not the religious elite. But simple shepherds. This is not accidental; God is making a profound statement.

The gospel does not begin in places of control, it does not depend on human credibility, and it does not need to be polished. God entrusts the greatest news ever told to people no one else would trust. Which tells us something important: God is not interested in our resumes. We might think we are far removed from those shepherds, but I am not so sure. Many people today feel just as unqualified, just as skeptical, just as uncertain. Some are here tonight with deep faith. Others are here out of habit, nostalgia, family obligation, or mild guilt. Some have been hurt by the Church. Some are tired of religious performances. Some are not sure what they believe anymore. And yet here we all are, staring at the same manger.

That is the thing about this child. He does not force himself on anyone. He does not demand belief. He simply lies there, vulnerable, exposed, waiting to be received. Which brings me to something we need to say out loud. This child is not a mascot for our causes. He is not a tool for political power. He is not a commodity

to be marketed. He is not owned by any institution, ideology, or tribe. This child dismantles every system that claims to control God. God does not arrive with rules to manage us. God arrives as someone who can be held, someone who can be rejected, someone who can be loved.

And yes, our world often prefers other Christmas stories. We are flooded with movies about Santa, princes from fictional European countries, and last-minute romances that somehow solve everything in ninety minutes. There is nothing wrong with a little holiday fluff. But notice how easily the real story disappears. Who has time for a vulnerable Jewish baby when there are so many forms of entertainment and even inspiration to watch? There is Tic Tick, Instagram, Threads, Netflix, Hulu and a hundred other channels to enjoy. And yet, this baby refuses to go away. He has a habit of breaking into lives when people least expect it. He unsettles complacency, exposes our excesses, and challenges our indifference. He keeps showing up where he is not invited or even welcomed.

He shows up because he knows that we still need him. We need him in a world that values strength over compassion. We need him in a culture that mistakes noise for truth. We need him in a society addicted to outrage and consumption. We need him in our own lives when we are tired, cynical, bitter, or afraid. This child grows up to confront injustice, forgive sinners, welcome outcasts, and absorb violence rather than inflict it. This child grows up to show us what humanity was always meant to be. This child grows up to give his life, not because God demands blood, but because love refuses to abandon those he loves.

The angels told the shepherds this evening: “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people.” This is good news, not because it is sentimental, but because it is true. Good news, not because it ignores suffering, but because it enters our suffering. Good news, not because it promises escape, but because it promises God’s presence with us and for us. This child is the Emmanuel. He is not God against us, but God with us. Tonight, God offers us the same invitation given to shepherds: Go and see the sign. See what love looks like when God refuses to stay distant, when God chooses to be on the side of humanity.

You do not need to have everything figured out to come to this child. You do not need perfect faith. You do not need the right words or the right wisdom. You simply need to welcome him into your heart. And if you do, you will discover that God has been on your side since before you took your first breath. This child is God’s gift to you. I pray today that you may accept this gift because this child makes all the difference in the world. Amen!