

What was God Thinking?

A Sermon for Christmas Eve

Offered by
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I love kids. I just wish they wouldn't start out as babies. They're way too much work.

On April 22, 2010, approximately 7 years after I had last cared for a newborn, I found another one in my arms. I'm not complaining. I'm *whining*, which is no less annoying, but slightly different. I'm *whining* because it's not like I actually think babies are bad or that life *should* work differently. In fact, I'm not sure that I'd want kids to arrive as fully formed three year-olds, walking and talking and potty-trained --- although at times this is quite appealing. No, there's a reason we all start out as tiny, helpless, fragile, infants.

It's not for *their* benefit. Infancy is probably the most dangerous time of life for humans. Babies would be better off if they could by-pass that stage. But that's not God's design for babies or for us.

Babies, if they don't make us *crazy*, make us *better*. And sometimes they do both. If you've ever cared for a child or grandchild – or even volunteered in the church nursery for a few hours, you know what I mean.

Back in April two sisters arrived at our home as part of the county's foster parent program. One of them, the one who is still with us, Allie, was three weeks old at the time – and tiny. In a matter of just a few hours our world transformed in so many ways.

Our priorities shifted. Suddenly Kari and I were hopelessly outnumbered. Every decision was about, “what's going to be best for the girls.” It was as if the center of our universe shifted away from us and toward these two tiny strangers. Even the boys made the shift. They knew

that, for a while at least, they were going to have to play second fiddle to the new arrivals.

We started taking a longer range view of life. I checked out our life insurance policies and began to think about the future. How are we going to manage this? We began to wonder if we had bit off more than we could chew, if maybe Kari and I had misunderstood God's promptings. We knew we couldn't do it alone. We prayed. A lot. For guidance. For strength. For sleep.

When was the last time you were around a baby that couldn't stop crying? There were long stretches in the early weeks when minutes seemed like hours. Hours like days. Time changes around babies. But now when we look back at photos from those days it seems like it passed so quickly. Babies make us appreciate *moments*.

Babies are humbling, too, aren't they? If you're used to solving problems with a few key strokes on the computer, if you're used to having all the answers, if you're used to going to the store without formula stains on your shoulder, babies will work that pride right out of you.

Kari and I have always tried to be good parents, but somehow these girls made us want to focus on that goal even more. They brought out reserves in us we didn't even know we had.

It was hard to say "Goodbye" to Tegan, the older sister, when the time came about a month ago, but right about the time when our tears were really flowing, the younger sister Allie, saved the day. It's not like she started speaking. Something even better. She started laughing—giggling, really. There's nothing like a baby's laugh to warm your heart.

That laugh tells me that God knew *exactly* what He was doing in coming to us, not as a fully formed man, but as a *baby*.

Babies aren't threatening, they're *inspiring*. Babies don't make you think, "I better shape up." They make you think, "I want to give them my very best." Maybe that's how God wants us to feel when we see Jesus: not afraid, but inspired. And challenged to be our very best.

And when life gets hard, when days are long and nights even longer still, when there are more bills than you can manage, when you feel ready to give up, that's when God wants us to remember the child in the manger and the relief he brought to Mary and Joseph when he finally laughed for the first time.

You may recall that Silent Night began as a German carol, dashed off quickly before a Christmas Eve service. The version we sing is wonderful, but a little different than the original. In "Stille Nacht" the words paint a portrait of the baby Jesus in living color. There's even a verse that goes, roughly,

*Silent night, holy night
Son of God, O how love laughs
from your Godly mouth.*

Can you imagine the infant Christ giggling? With love bubbling out from his mouth? That's got to be the happiest sound in the world!

Maybe God came as a baby to get our priorities to shift, from being "us" centered to being "Christ" centered.

Maybe God came as a baby to get us to take a longer view of life – to teach us to enjoy every moment *and* to keep eternity in mind at the same time.

Maybe God came as a baby to humble us – to remind us that we don't have all the answers – and that life isn't even about having all the answers – it's about giving and receiving love.

Maybe God came as a baby to require of us more than we think we're capable of, to make us call out to Him for help, to force us to use all the gifts that the Holy Spirit has placed inside us.

In coming as a baby two thousand years ago, maybe God intended a cosmic shift to take place not just in Mary's and Joseph's lives, but in *our* lives, too, tonight.

When we look at our world, with wars raging, people struggling, and climates changing, every baby – including the one we celebrate in the manger – is God’s promise that life will go on.

And if we wonder, “what difference a baby can make in such a world?” All we need to do is ask, what difference can a *spark* make?

It all depends upon how ready the world is to catch fire.

What about you? How ready are you, tonight, to start a new relationship with the Christ child? How ready are you to catch fire and burn with passion and conviction in your life?

If you take caring for this child seriously – if you take discipleship seriously – *you will be changed*. Priorities will shift, time will bend, miracles will happen. You will be humbled, you will grow, you will not settle for anything less than being your very best. That’s what “accepting” this baby can do.

If you’ve always pictured God all grown up, tonight see God in the manger. That baby doesn’t care about how you look or how much money you make. He doesn’t care if you have a job or a family. He doesn’t care about how old you are or what you’ve done in the past. He doesn’t care about any of that – he cares about *you*. He needs *you*. God wants to connect with you, laugh with you, and grow with you. That’s a gift that puts everything else into perspective. Amen.

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