

# FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sunday, December 18, 2011

*Fourth Sunday in Advent*



## A Baby Truly Changes Everything

*by Pastor Larry Moffet*

### ***Something about a baby does change everything.***

Parents can plan. The baby engages life on her/his own terms, on his/her own schedule. It doesn't take long to realize the smallest one in the family controls everyone else's agenda.

Something about a baby changes everything: even people in a rush at the store stop to talk and make goo-goo eyes at a little baby.

I myself was rushing around yesterday. I was on a mission. Our youth agreed to help me make a bunch of *luminaria* for Christmas Eve services. Do you know how hard it is to find 200 white paper sacks in Lincoln?

Through it all I was amazed at how good a mood people were in. After all, these are the last days of the Christmas rush. People stopped to say hi. Several I didn't recognize right away said, "We'll see you for Christmas Eve next Saturday night."

Two women stopped talking to ask if they could help me find something. I looked that confused! They would not let me settle for brown lunch bags: "White sacks will show up so much better with candles. Go ask the bakery. That store's bakery had only plastic sacks. Bakery workers conferred and sent me on to another store. People there gave me the answer: go to the popcorn store!

Why were people being so kind? Then I remembered all afternoon I had seen babies everywhere. People behave better when there are babies. People stopped to ask about the babies. Maybe I'm more tuned into babies than I used to be because we have baptized over 20 babies and 4 adults so far this year at First Church. Most of the babies are ones we see often in worship.

**The story of the Birth of the Baby Jesus helps us see how every bit of new life embodies the truth us that God is with us, no matter what.**

There is a big picture to this story of the Birth of Jesus. About five years ago Rob Bell wrote a book [*Velvet Elvis: Repainting Christian Faith*] that helped us see the big picture of Jesus's life:

**For many people the message of Jesus is an individual message of salvation for their own individual sin: "Jesus died for you."**

**I affirm that wholeheartedly, but in the scriptures, its scope goes in the opposite direction. It begins with the Jesus who is born like us, lives our life, knows our struggles, dies on the cross and rises from the dead. But as the New Testament progresses, you have writers saying that "Jesus is reconciling everything in heaven and on earth." Peter says in Acts,**

**"He will return to restore everything."**

**So it is a giant thing that God is doing here and not just the forgiveness of individuals. It is the reconciliation of all things. It is the putting back together of the whole universe how God originally intended it to be.**

**It's easy for the faith to become a very selfish thing -**

**"look what I've got"- as opposed to "**

**look at this an awe-inspiring, amazing thing that God's been inviting people into for thousands of years."**

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Immediately after the visit of the Angel Gabriel, Mary goes to her cousin Elizabeth. The young woman has an aging cousin as her spiritual guide.

It is a beautiful story. Elizabeth, gifted with years of insight, says Luke:

**<sup>41</sup>And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit**

**<sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.**

**<sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me,  
that the mother of my Lord comes to me?**

This is how Mary understood what was happening, according to Luke:

**My soul magnifies the Lord,**

**<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

**<sup>48</sup> for God has looked with favor  
on the lowliness of God’s servant.**

**God scatters the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.**

**<sup>52</sup> Brings down the powerful from their thrones, and lifts up the lowly;**

**<sup>53</sup> fills the hungry with good things,**

**and sends those who think they have everything away feeling empty.**

Every time a lowly person is lifted up,  
every time something new takes hold of us,  
every act of justice,

every time we feel something new and glorious grab us:

God’s New Creation is birthed anew in us in us. Christ, the baby, is born.

However, we must remind ourselves what the carols we sing say so well:

Mary didn’t give birth to a concept, or an avatar, or an idea, or a process.

Tesavlation of the world began with a real, living baby, fully human, fully divine.

Something very big, something very unexpected begins with this baby.

This is how salvation comes to us: through a baby so fragile, so vulnerable.

To borrow Mary’s words, God is lifting up the lowly, scattering the proud  
in their imaginations, and filling the hungry with good things.

**God starts with a baby.**

**Isn’t that beautiful! Isn’t that just like God:**

**to help us see God at work through a baby,  
a baby who does truly change everything.**

#### **HEBREW SCRIPTURE ZECHARIAH 5:2-5**

But you O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the littlest cities of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

<sup>3</sup>Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.

<sup>4</sup>And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord our God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;

<sup>5</sup>and he shall be the one of peace.

#### **SECOND SCRIPTURE COLOSSIANS 1:13-20**

God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kin-dom of his beloved Son,

<sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>15</sup>Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

<sup>16</sup>for in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers— all things have been created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup>Christ himself is before all things; in him all things hold together.

<sup>18</sup>He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup>In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

<sup>20</sup>and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace.

#### **GOSPEL LUKE 1:46-55** And Mary said, ‘**My soul magnifies the Lord,**

**<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

**<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.**

**Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;**

**<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.**

**<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.**

**<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;**

**he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts,**

**<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;**

**<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,**

**<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’**