

A Childish Christmas  
Sunday Advent 4, Year B  
2 Samuel 7: 1 – 11, 16; Romans 16: 25 – 27; Luke 1: 26 – 38  
December 20, 2020

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

I could use my own family for this story. You could probably use yours, too. It is so familiar and timeless, we have all experienced it. So, I will use the traditional names of generic children, Tommy and Sally.

Tommy and Sally are ready for Christmas. SOOOOooo ready!! Christmas for these youngsters is always full of anticipation and excitement. So much of it is familiar and safe, yet there is the ‘Great Unknown’. That is what drove them crazy. Not knowing what hid beneath all that wrapping paper was just too much for their little bodies to handle. The days just dragged on and on and on and on... it’s only five days until Christmas... but, it feels like five thousand...

Mom and Dad, on the other hand, are not ready for Christmas. SOOOOooooo not ready!! Christmas for these grown up is always full of anxiety and stress. So many unknowns and lists, yet, there is the ‘Great Familiar’. That is what drove them crazy. Knowing that the in-laws were coming and the house wasn’t ready, the shopping wasn’t done, the decorations weren’t all set, the cooking wasn’t fully planned... was just too much for their bodies to handle. The days flew by faster and faster and faster... it’s only five days until Christmas... but, it feels like five minutes.

Truth? I think this is the reality...even in this pandemic year. And, if its not the stress of preparation, it’s the stress of separation. Either way, that joyous anticipation of our childhood has diminished. I hope it isn’t gone. I hope that there is still Christmas music to be played, Christmas movies, like Die Hard, to be watched, Christmas presents to anticipate and to give. Family to converse with.

I fear, however, that we look at that first Christmas through our adult eyes. We've heard it before. We know Jesus comes. There is no anticipation. No excitement at the pronouncement of the coming Savior. We know how that story began and how it ended. The eagerness is gone. Jesus comes, angels sing, shepherds worship, yada-yada. I have all the figures of that scene on my mantle.

But, remember, today, what all of that means. Don't just remember the story. Look deeper within the words. Put, the images in your mind. Examine the motivations of those people. Why did the angels sing? Why did the shepherds go and worship a baby?

It was because they all had that childlike anticipation of the coming of their salvation. What better gift could we receive? Socks for Christmas? A new bike? That 70" UHD, LED, TV, with surround sound and voice activation? .... NO.

While our sinful flesh may desire and cry out for such things, the Holy Spirit within us turns our sin sick hearts to the things of God.

There is a popular Christmas song, that many like, myself included, but it draws purely on speculation. It is much like the Christian song "I Can Only Imagine." It activates the Christian imagination to look beyond the words on the page and into the depth of the humanity of those who wrote those words and those of whom they write about.

While "I Can Only Imagine" has us wondering about what heaven would be like (if you really want to know, go to the book of Revelation), this other song, "Mary Did You Know," has us looking into the mind of Mary as she followed her Son throughout His life.

"Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?" "Mary did you know that your baby boy would... save the world, heal the blind, calm storms..." The song has many questions.

And, we could argue about just how much Mary actually did know. Scripture doesn't reveal everything that she knew before it happened. But, in our reading today, the angel Gabriel does reveal some pretty heavy stuff to this young woman (who was probably around 14 years old). *“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* The angel continues, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.”*

Can you imagine, carrying around this gift in your body. Perhaps, some of you mothers can get a sense of it. But, as a man, it is totally foreign to me. The Son of God, God's greatest gift to humanity, to the world, to all of creation, in human flesh, and then wrapped in the womb of Mary.

If only Mary had written down all her thoughts and feelings about that experience.

Of course we know how the rest of this story goes. The angel continues, *“And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.”*<sup>37</sup> *For nothing will be impossible with God.”* Mary then hurries off to visit Elizabeth. Two miraculous conceptions. Two miraculous births. Two overjoyed women. Two very important babies.

It is when Mary visits Elizabeth that Mary expresses her joy in the Magnificat, which we have sung each Wednesday this Advent season. Look it up in this very same chapter of Luke. Mary was excited, full of joy and anticipation.

What would it all mean? What would He look like? What wonders, if any, would He perform? What exactly was God's plan?

Mary was excited to have God in human flesh. Even, if you remember, John the Baptizer was excited, as he leapt in Elizabeth's womb when Jesus came near. He and Elizabeth were excited, too.

What a gift to have God present in our midst.

King David, too, was excited to have God in his midst. David was saddened to see the Ark of the Covenant residing in a tent, while he, the king, lived in a palace. He planned to build a temple for God, so that God would be present among the people and they would know where to go to find Him. Yet, God flips it on David and says that God would make David a house.

And, so He did. The House of David, the Tree of Jesse, was being proclaimed by Gabriel to Mary.

The same Jesus who washes us in Holy Baptism, who comes to us in the Holy Supper, who is revealed to us in His Holy Word and whose love is pronounced through Holy Absolution. These are the gifts that He gives us, not once a year, but every Sunday.

Our Lord is here among us, handing out His gifts. Let us see them with the eyes of a child at Christmas. Excited to be forgiven and reconciled to our God. Anticipating the feast that He has prepared for us. Longing to have the conversation with Him through prayer, the liturgy and His Word.

No, Bah-Humbug here. Just a gleeful prayer of HO-HO-HOLY Lord be with us and help us, as we prayed in the Collect, that the sins which weigh us down, the things that distract us from that Holy Day and the true gifts that matter, may be quickly lifted by His grace and mercy.

*Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*