

**Christmas in the Crook of Our Arms**  
**Christmas Eve Homily**  
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**Sardis Baptist Church**  
**Luke 2:1-20**  
**12-24-2019**

Luke's birth narrative has captured our imagination for two millennia. And to be honest, the story is SO intriguing, it's hard to decide which detail is the best.

Senior citizens, who have been faithful and righteous their whole lives, become first-time parents, and to an important messenger, nonetheless. Meanwhile, their teenage cousin learns that she too will become a first-time mother. And her son is also special: he's the long-awaited messiah. A makeshift manger offers impeccable hospitality. Mangy shepherds become couriers of good news. An angel chorus sings sweet hallelujahs. And barnyard animals: sheep, donkeys, oxen, all kinds of furry critters serve as witnesses to the little boy's arrival. And all of this is to say nothing of a census, and cool names like Quirinius, or an evil emperor, or the plight of refugees.

This is high drama, y'all. Extraordinary things are happening. Usually, it's one of these details that inspires my Christmas eve homily. I've talked about innkeepers, and angels, and God's creative power, and the forces of good overcoming evil. This year, something a little less obvious caught my attention.

For me, this year's Christmas story was revealed in hearing preschoolers sing *Away in a Manger*. And in the words of our choir's cantata – the song about Mary sitting under the starlight and holding her newborn child in her arms. And in a conversation with John Simpson about that profound little rhyme: *The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

The very One who created the universe – the heavens, and the earth, and the seas, and all the things that fill them – that powerful One, is revealed in the birth of a child. A child who lays in the crook of his mother's arms, gazing at the starlight, and finding comfort in the soothing lullaby she hums, and the soft, but sturdy beating of her heart.

Such an image stops me in my tracks. I'll be honest with you, prior to having children of my own, I didn't pay much attention to the crook in my arm – it was just something to drool in while in a deep, deep sleep, or to hang as many grocery bags or suitcases on as I could so I wouldn't have to make a second trip back to the car to get the rest, or maybe it was that pesky spot that flares up each time I get tennis elbow. But then one day, that strange little piece of anatomy on my right arm, the curve of my elbow, became the very first resting place for my little girl. She wasn't even five minutes old, and she was screaming and breathing heavy (and so was I by the way!), and she was this combination of delight, and anxiety, and awe, and terror, and potential, and busyness, and vulnerability, and courage, and strength, and humanity. And she was beautiful. And they wrapped her up, this perfectly new, filled-with-potential, prophetic, screaming proclaimer, and they put her in my arms, my crook, and all at once, the world was still and dizzying at the same time, and she nestled into me, as if to say, "Daddy, and Mamma, our lives are gonna be intertwined." And let me tell you, each and every time she and her sister find my crook, I am transported, we are transported, to sacred space.

If God, like each of us, enters this world as a child, then God needs us, God longs for us, God wants to grow, and be in community with us. What a beautiful image! God says, "I'm coming into the world, to help reclaim and restore its purpose, and I want you, all of you, to be a part of it."

"I'll need a crook to lay my head in. And I'll need someone to sing to me. And to recognize my gifts and to encourage those gifts. I'll need neighbors. And friends. And servants. And I'll need to be the same to others."

Friends, I think it's high time we started paying attention to the crook in our arm. This world is fragile, y'all. The truth is the inn is still full for too many people. And there are too many shepherds who keep their watch, not yet aware of that angel chorus. Travelers still follow the star longing for an oasis of peace as they are mired in deserts of conflict. And that census is still causing trouble, creating refugees, engraining privilege, working ever harder to dilute the value of God's children.

But One night, long, long ago, Jesus found the comfort of loving arms, and the faith of an eclectic community – shepherds, angels, old women and men, young

ones too, innkeepers, seekers, and stargazers, to recognize, encourage, and empower his gifts. And for one night, the hopes and fears of all the world were met in God's bright light. And the life of One who lived wholly and fully into God's potential, was set in motion.

The audacious truth of Christmas is that such a night, can also be this very night. The even more audacious truth is that each of us has the potential to be like that child – to be people who live as if God is with us, right now, and in so doing, help make God's world, God's world.

Christmas is here, friends. Cradle it, right in the crook of your arms, under bright starlight, amidst an eclectic group of believers.

Amen.