

Christmas Eve, Year B
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The Reverend Rob P. Travis

“O Come Let Us Adore Him By Taking Care Of Others Around Us”

Our God came into the world He created as a defenseless baby! So the nativity story presents a huge contrast. It reminds me of the passage in Isaiah where God tells us for your ways are not my ways.

God showed us this most clearly in His Incarnation in becoming one of us, He showed us how differently He does things, how His power is made perfect in weakness. The story begins with a decree going out from Emperor Augustus. Here the contrast begins. The story of the coming of God into the world, in human flesh, begins with one of the greatest of Kings, Caesar Augustus. His name means majesty. His long reign was so successful, that all Roman Emperors following him claimed his name as one of their titles. He was called Savior of the World, and his power reached throughout the known world, extending beyond any previous empire. Augustus was the image of worldly power. When he spoke, the whole world listened. When he acted, the whole world responded.

In the Gospel of Luke, the story of Jesus' birth begins with Caesar Augustus. And it emphasizes the humble incarnation of God. Imagine, this great King Augustus, telling the whole world what to do.

And in a tiny corner of his great empire, in a backwater town, in a strategically unimportant place, there are two humble people, a young woman and a man, betrothed to each other, but possessing little in the way of wealth, and even less in the way of power.

They were preparing to have a baby. They had no place to give birth to the child. They were away from their home at the command of this Emperor. They found a stable for animals, to provide shelter from the elements. And Mary bore her child, wrapped him in strips of cloth, and laid him in a feed trough. This baby came into the world in the most humble of conditions. Yet He happens to be the one who created the whole universe.

So while Caesar Augustus is making decrees, from his royal home, believing and believed by many to be the savior of the world, this baby, who is the one true God in the flesh, lies in a manger, surrounded by his poor parents, and some poor shepherds. That contrast shows how differently God perceives the world, from how we perceive it.

There have been other religions which imagined God in the form of a boy. But it takes Christianity to see the truth, God in Christ Jesus came into the world as a baby.

The One upon whom depends the entire creation, came as a completely dependant infant, fragile, and weak. The one who created all life, who was the source of life, made Himself unable to live without the support of His Mother and the protection of the Father who adopted Him.

This vulnerability should make us stop and think. When humans want to express something as great, they create it as big, powerful, controlling. When God shows the truth of His greatness, it is in weakness, smallness, lacking control and power.

God seems to like to teach us about Himself, by presenting paradoxes. Here is perfect power, in the perfect weakness of an infant, the Light of the world, Born in the darkness of a winter's night. God made us in His image, And then came enfleshed in that image, in the form of a baby, to tell us what the image was originally meant to reflect.

A child was born for us, and authority rests upon his shoulders, his small, fragile infant shoulders. He is a baby, sucking at his mother's breast, yet he is named Wonderful Counselor. He is a newborn, unable to lift his own head, yet He is called Mighty God. He is a nobody, born in the middle of nowhere, yet rather than the Emperor who was responsible for the Pax Romana, This baby boy is the true Prince of Peace. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams recently described the significance of this incarnation. "God chose to show himself to us in a complete human life, telling us that every stage in human existence, from conception to maturity and even death, was in principle capable of telling us something about God. Although what we learn from Jesus Christ and what his life makes possible is unique, that life still means that we look differently at every other life. There is something in us that is capable of communicating what God has to say - the image of God in each of us, which is expressed in its perfection only in Jesus."

In Jesus' incarnation God is present in the most dependent, and vulnerable of Human beings. If we choose to see it, that can make us look differently at the others around us who are weak, vulnerable, dependent. In them we can see the image of God. That is why we are so inclined to help others at this time of year, and why we need to extend that Christian caring throughout the year.

I read recently some online responses to an article about the plan in Knoxville to eradicate chronic homelessness in 10 years. Some claimed that we should not help these people because they should be independent like everyone else. That helping them in their needs is making the problem worse. That is not an attitude, which understands the incarnation of God as a baby. If we would look at those in need around us, and see Jesus in each of them, look at the potential, rather than the problem, we can adore Christ all over again.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, there is a bit of prophecy, long before the birth of Jesus, we read: "When all things were in quiet silence, and the night in its swift course was half spent, your all-powerful word leapt down from heaven's royal throne."

This is what happened on that first Christmas, and it is still shocking, when we consider the way we regard power and Royal grandeur in the world. The all-powerful royal one came as a defenseless, dependent, weak baby child of peasants! Perhaps the shepherds that night, and the wise men who would come later, saw the greatness of the paradox, the greatest one of all, in the flesh of one so weak.

The implications are world-changing. So come with me to worship our God and King, in his lowly manger. O Come, let us adore Him, by caring for those around us who are weak, dependent, defenseless!