

How To Encounter a Baby? - Christmas 2019 - SPR - Shawn Evelyn

It does not matter where you are from, how old you are, or how much money you make, there is one thing that all of us can typically agree on and it's this...babies are great. It is true not everyone wants to be a parent, but most of us can agree that babies are great. Children bring hope. They are supposed to be better than what we ever can be. And throughout the years, it gets harder to have children. We have been known to ask the same question, is it right to bring a baby into this world? With the violence, fighting amongst ourselves, fighting for resources, money, and so on, and so on. The challenge can be finding when the opportune time is to make it happen only to learn that there is none, life finds a way. And there are several things we like to do with babies when we encounter them, whether consciously or unconsciously, we open our eyes wide and we speak to them, we try to figure out which parent they most resemble, we smile at them to try to get them to smile back at us.

Today is the day we celebrate Christmas. This is the day we have selected to celebrate Jesus Christ coming into our world and how he came into our world as a baby. As Christians, it is how we encounter this baby that helps us to understand who we are. But this is not like any other baby we have encountered? We are not able to open our eyes wide and try to speak with it, we are not able to figure out which parent he resembles, and when we smile at him, we will not be getting a smile back in return. So how do we celebrate today, how do we encounter this baby?

We just finished our period of Advent, a period that is supposed to be a solemn, and penitential time where we focus on themes of anticipation, preparation, and the dualism between the light and the dark. We started this year with a message from Jesus to his disciples as he tells them that something is coming, the Son of Man, and they should be ready, they should be conscious for what will be coming. Next we hear from and about John the Baptist. This wild unkempt recluse who is telling people to repent and calling out religious leaders to be intentional about their baptism and to live into what it means. Then Jesus telling the people

about expectation and what they thought John would be and the reality of what they encountered. Finally we have an account of the dream that came to Joseph confirming not only the work of the Holy Spirit, but of prophecy of the child that was to come. How do we encounter this baby? We encounter this baby with the help of Advent. We practice the rhythm of preparation, and reflect on the messages received in baptism, through John, in dreams, and in teaching. We are aware that there is darkness but it does not consume us, light will guide us through when we are not able to see, when we are for a lack of other words, lost. We encounter this baby because God no longer wishes for us to be lost.

We encounter this baby by what we believe and how we worship and how we interpret the Incarnation, and in how we express our faith in that same Incarnation. God gave us a child, God gives God's self to us, the act of God reclaiming humanity that was lost by being known to us as a human, the divine becoming flesh. And what we know of the Incarnation comes from the Word. This is not just the Word that is found in scripture, the Word is also what we come to understand it as, the Eternal Word, and the Word that has been, is being, and will continue to be proclaimed, that we know as Gospel. We are familiar with the Word as Gospel and we are familiar with the Word as scripture found in the Bible, but what about this Eternal Word? The answer lies in what we heard, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John's Gospel, unlike any other Gospel, gives us language to describe God as the Eternal Word, and of Christ's relationship to God, letting us know they are the same and that Christ came to reveal, to show us what we were not able to see. Light guiding us through dark, just as in the creation of this world, from a void to brilliance, from nothing to all things.

You would have to imagine why this is important, you would have to imagine the necessity of it all, of God not only meeting us where we are but in doing so with a baby. We

talked about it earlier, about bringing a child into this world, and the question we seem to always ask, with the violence, fighting amongst ourselves, fighting for resources, money, and so on, and so on is it right to bring a baby into this world? We clearly see that Jesus came into this world of divine yet humble origins. No room at the inn, born among barn animals, he grew, healed and taught, and because of that was betrayed by his own people, people that wanted a king when they didn't realize they had one right under their own noses. It's hard, it's hard to consider, but because of it, because that baby was brought into our world, we have the gift of salvation. Our lives are better because God reached out.

How do we encounter this baby? We celebrate Jesus Christ coming into this world, we celebrate his life and his ministry, and look forward to the time when he will return and know that when that happens the world will never be the same. Jesus Christ is here, he is the light and we are here to testify to the light, and when we do, we shine brighter. When we encounter this baby, we learn more about God and we have Faith in knowing we are children of God. We give and receive gifts but this time of year, can be seen as a festival of lights. The Advent Wreath that helps us get ready, is now fully lit, and in many places where they are able, lights are adorned for the whole world to see and remember that you too are God's light in the world. May you look on those lights and find joy. Joy to the World, the Lord has come! You can't have Christmas without Jesus Christ. Go tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere, go tell it on the mountains that Jesus Christ is born. Amen