



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

December 25, 2013 – Christmas Day

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The passage selected for the sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel;

“Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace good will towards men.”

Luke 2:12-14

When I was teaching, my 10th grade students would often ask me, “Why is it you believe in Jesus?” After all, I looked normal to them, or some acceptable version of normal. I was smart enough, had been to a good school, and even had had some success in the world. It puzzled them that someone they recognized as smart could so confidently affirm his faith in Jesus.

The answer was of course, that no matter how smart we are, or think we are, we cannot come to confidence in our faith through reasoning or rationality. The events that affirm our faith undeniably are the comings or goings of people from this mortal coil. It is then that the façade of reality thins so that we see through to the other side, and our recognition of God's power in our lives takes firm root. Since this is Christmas, today we will talk about the power of God as manifested in a birth.

A baby is inherently powerful. We think of them as powerless, but in reality, what we see is that

they are vulnerable. From the moment a baby is born, it begins to re-shape the world and reality of its family. Its father and mother are re-defined by the baby's needs. We were once Mike and Carolyn, but we are now, the children's parents. Keeping that baby fed, and dry and safe becomes the focal point of a parent's life, replacing every other priority we might have pursued. If you doubt a baby's power to command from its crib, defy the tired mother or father who begs you, “SSSHHH! Don't wake the baby!”

The birth of any baby is a world shaking event to the parents. The awe and perfection of creation is laid bare in miracle of life and breath first grasped. The true nature of love is revealed, humbling us and disintegrating all our vanities. Who we are, who we are meant to be, explodes into our consciousness as an Epiphany, and the pointlessness of the charades of this world's power and glory wither in the presence of God's truth, that we were made in Love by our Father for the purpose of being loved by Him, and that the one true gift is the love we have the privilege to return to Him and share with those He gives us.

Do any of you remember the book or miniseries, Roots. When my daughter was born, I was filled with pride, not in some symbolic way, but literally, my chest swelled with joy, my eyes teared up, and the baby was lifted to heaven in my arms so that I could swear to God that she would have everything she could ever need or

want. But suddenly, a realization washed over me, humbling me and changing me forever. I could not give her the world. In fact, this little child had just given the world to me. I was changed forever by the miracle of God's grace, not only in His power to give life, but in His unimaginable kindness to share that life with me. To share with me what it meant to love as the Father.

My life changed. My doubts evaporated. My purpose was made clear. The pretensions of this world were unmasked. I knew, in a way I could never have learned by reason alone, why I was here and what I was meant to do.

If just any child can change a world so profoundly, imagine the Power of God's only Son as he takes upon Himself our nature in His Incarnation. A child is born and wrapped in swaddling clothes. He is laid in the hay of the manger of stable. We use the pretty French word, Creche, instead of stable as we romanticize the Infant's birth, but the reality was the baby was born in a stable that functioned like stables do today, filled with the smell of hay, pre and post digested. Not a lovely smell, not very sanitary, not a very privileged or romantic birth, and yet the humble stable walls evaporated into the choir pews of a multitude of the heavenly host as they sang their praises. Shepherds and wise men travelled to pay homage. Even the very stars of the sky oriented the heavens to announce His birth.

In that moment the world was changed. The pretensions and lies and aimlessness and despair of this world were revealed as inconsequential to our purpose. The barrier between heaven and earth dissolved. Communion between man and God was restored. The Way home to our heavenly father was revealed.

In this season of giving, we can be mindful of the gifts that we receive through the Incarnation. By the birth of that Child, we are re-born to our created purpose. Where we once faced the fear

of death, and separation from our loved ones, that lie is exposed. Death is revealed to be the door through which we pass to reunion with our loved ones eternally.

The tyranny of a world ruled by survival and violence rationalized by might is replaced by the Golden rule, the law of charity.

The despair that comes from our fragility of will and body, our descent into sickness and weakness, and our failures to hold the needs of those we love above our own desires and willfulness are swept away in favor of God's love, through which we have confidence in our Resurrected bodies and the strength to love each other as we are loved by God.

In the place of hardened and unforgiving hearts, we are given reconciliation. In the place of despair that our own trespasses are too loathsome to warrant forgiveness, we are given hope that we can be forgiven as we have been given the power to forgive.

Most importantly, instead of the doubts of existentialism and the tyranny of oppression of atheism, the dehumanization of every socialism, the numbing pointlessness of consumerism, we are given the certainty of simple truth. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that all that believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And the purpose of that life is beautiful in its simplicity. We are made to be loved, and overflow with the gift of that love in thanksgiving to God and in service of each other.

Because that little Child in a humble manger is the author and the earnest of all these gifts, let us join the angels as the proclaim, Glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace, good will towards men.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen