

And What About Us? (Luke 2:1-10)

An Easter sunrise service is held every year on the rim of the Grand Canyon. As the resurrection account is read about the angel rolling away the stone from the tomb, a massive boulder is pushed over the edge into the canyon. The congregation always shudders as the boulder bounces and crashes into the depths of the canyon. William Sloane Coffin was once asked if he thought this was too dramatic. And he replied, "No, the gospel message...demands such drama."

So it is with our message for tonight. Our Christmas Eve service demands drama. It begins in a small, quiet, and gentle way with a tiny baby being born on a cold winter's night in a lowly stable. But suddenly the little stable is not big enough to contain the drama. Like a huge boulder bouncing noisily down the Grand Canyon, wave after wave of persons arrive in response to the baby's birth. Thus the focus in the drama switches from the event itself—the birth of the baby—to the way everyone responds to the event.

First, angels come from heaven. Their response to the birth is to praise God and to sing of peace. They also respond by sharing the good news of the birth with some shepherds in the surrounding countryside. And the shepherds' response? They go with haste and find Mary, Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. And when they see the child, they just have to tell someone else the good news. So the shepherds return back home, glorifying and praising God all the way for all they have heard and seen. In other words, they go off and find others and tell them about the baby and what the angels have said about him. And no doubt these others responded the same way, by telling yet others, for the gospel writer says, they too "were amazed at what the shepherds told them." Next, magi or wise men from the East arrive. And their response? They give the baby the best gifts they can give: gold; frankincense; and myrrh. The gospel writer Luke, obviously wanting to emphasize the response that the baby elicits from everyone, even tells us the response of the baby's mother. Mary listened to the responses of everyone else, and then, according to Luke, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart."

And what about us? What will be our response to the baby's birth? If we really grasp the drama going on tonight, we too cannot help but enter into the drama and make our own response.

We'll change deep within ourselves. Theologian Peter Gomes has said, "Have you ever noticed that most secular stories about Christmas are conversion stories? Either someone's heart is changed, or someone's outlook is changed." We enjoy reading about Ebenezer Scrooge, because of the inner response that occurs within him. We cheer watching "It's a Wonderful Life" because of the response that occurs deep within George Bailey. We smile when we notice in "A Charlie Brown Christmas," that right after Linus reads the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke, just as we did tonight, he lets go of his security blanket.

The birth of Jesus means that God loves us so much that he has come to be with us. Jesus is often referred to as Emmanuel, the Hebrew word which means "God-With-Us." We celebrate Christmas because the coming of Jesus means that we are no longer alone—that God is with us—to love us; to forgive us; to enlighten us; to guide us; to comfort us; to encourage us; to heal us. Believing this, trusting this truth, like Ebenezer Scrooge, George Bailey, and Linus, we too can come to know fearlessness, peace, and joy.

And hopefully this inner response will bubble up and out of us, erupting in a response to others. Because of the change inside of him, Scrooge wanted to do all he could to make life better for the Cratchits. And because of the change that occurred inside of him, George Bailey ran through the streets speaking words of kindness and blessing to everyone whom he met. And Linus too wanted to show love for everyone. Theologian Martin Buber believed that God gives each one of us a small part of the world to redeem.

And when we make a loving response to others, we're also making a loving response to God. We're pleasing, praising, and glorifying God, for, just like us human parents, our Heavenly Father is most happy, most pleased, when his children show love to one another.

Linus, George Bailey, Ebenezer Scrooze, Mary, the wise men, the shepherds, and the angels have all played their part in the drama of this night. They've all made their response to the birth of the Christ Child, the coming of Emmanuel, the gift God has given us of himself. What will our response be? How will tonight change us and how we live our lives—how we relate to others

and to *God*? What will our part in tonight's gospel drama be? Indeed, and what about us? Amen.

--Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; December 24, 2008