

A BABY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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Luke 2:1-14

A Baby Makes A Difference.

If you have any doubt about that,

just asked the weary-eyed father

who stumbles out of bed to fetch the little cherub for his 2AM feeding and he will tell you:

A Baby Makes A Difference.

Or, ask the young Mother

who, slow of step and weary of mind,

drags herself up from an easy chair in answer to the future President's insistent plea for just

"one more drink of water"

or

"one last goodnight kiss"

and she will tell you:

A Baby Makes A Difference.

A minister friend of mine asked one of the youngsters in his primary department if they ever prayed in their home.

"Oh, yes," the child replied. "Every night. When Mommy puts me down to sleep she goes out of my room and when she has closed the door I hear her say,

"Thank God she's in bed!"

Yes, Mothers know

A Baby Makes A Difference.

But all of the differences are not on the debit side.

Along with labor a little baby brings laughter and joy.

Along with care comes cheer and charm.

Along with heartaches there is happiness and hope.

And there isn't one of us who has ever experienced the gladness a little child can bring into a home who would trade that gladness for the relative freedom we had before

our baby made a difference.

There is something almost miraculous about the power of a baby's smile and the warmth of a baby's laughter.

This came home to me with stark clarity one night in Berlin, Germany. I have never really been able to find words to describe the emotions I experienced my first night in that great, bombed-out, near-ghost of a city.

It was the summer of 1950. Europe was still recovering from the devastation of World War II. Our Evangelistic tour, under the sponsorship of the Baptist World Alliance, had taken us from England, where we picked up a small British car, to Scandinavia, and now, we were in Germany.

We had just come from happy, carefree Denmark, where the lacy green of springtime seemed to add to the easy-going nature of the people.

Everywhere there had been flowers bursting into bloom after their long sleep through the night of winter. The neatly tailored farms,

the spotless cities,

the ruddy-cheeked children,

had all joined together to make a lasting impression upon me.

An impression that life is good and well worth living.

And then came Germany.

I remember walking down Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin.

Past the great German War Ministry which had been blown to bits. I remember setting up my camera to take pictures of what was once the largest department store in Europe, but was now only an empty lot.

I remember Hitler's Chancellory with not one stone standing on another.

Everywhere, for miles on end, there was nothing but destruction. Even The Great Cathedral of Kaiser Wilhelm,

burial place of Germany's great and new great,
stood gaunt and hollow,
a grotesque silhouette against the backdrop of a moonlit sky.

As I walked alone amongst the ruins of Berlin that evening, I was overcome by an almost unbearable sense of the futility of life.

All about me were the evidences of man's inhumanity to man.

Each raw,
naked,
ruined building
seemed to shout that life is a joke.

A cold,
callous,
cruel joke with Fate as the Jester and people as the foil.

Even the moon seemed to laugh as it caused the bombed-out buildings to cast dark shadows across my path.

And then, a miracle happened, or so it seemed to me.

As I turned the corner and started down a little side street, I noticed a light streaming out of the basement of what remained of one of the apartment buildings. A broken piece of glass had been stuck into the window opening to help keep out the cold.

I carefully picked my way through the rubble and debris until I could see inside, and there I saw a little family sitting on boxes around what seemed to be a table.

There was very little on the table. But there were whole volumes written on the faces of
a young husband,
his wife and
their little boy.

Even in that fleeting glance, I saw enough to tell me that, for them, life was hard and without much hope.

I started to turn away, for I suddenly sensed I had no right to invade the privacy of even so rude a home as that, when I heard a baby laugh.

I looked back and saw the young mother lift a tiny child out of an orange crate crib. As she cradled it in her arms, the baby smiled, and with that smile it seemed as if the whole room lit up as
a weary, discouraged father
and his young son
gathered around the mother and her baby.

Soon, they all began to laugh.

A happy kind of laughter.

And then the wee lad began to sing in a beautiful soprano voice, a little German lullaby, the words of which I could not understand. I thought to myself:

A Baby Makes A Difference!

Quickly and quietly I made my way back to the street.

As I walked away, I could hear the echo of that baby laughing and I suddenly came to see that all was not lost.

As long as there are babies,
as long as there still exists the love of a parent for a child,
as long as there is life, there is hope!

And my mind went racing back across the centuries to another night when the pall of hopelessness had settled on the earth.

I saw another family scene:

a star,
a stable and
a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

And as I walked through the German streets it seemed as though I could hear the angels sing their song of hope again:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Here, indeed, was

A Baby That Made A Difference!

For the child who was born in Bethlehem of Judea was the Son of God, and from that moment until this, the hinge of history has swung from that stable door.

It was a glorious message the angels sang to the shepherds that night so long ago.

It was a message of hope.

A hope which has not dimmed with the passing years.

A hope that burns as brightly this morning as it did that first Christmas season 1961 years ago.

And though we read it again and again, the beauty of it never fades:

“And there were in the same country shepherds
abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock
by night. And Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon
them, and the glory of the Lord shone ‘round about
them: and they were sore afraid.”

And the angel said unto them,

“‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of
great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you
is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which
is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you;
Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling
clothes, lying 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 toward men’ ” (Luke II:8-14).

What are the ways in which this baby made a difference? Well, first of all His coming meant

THE END OF FEAR AND THE BEGINNING OF JOY.

It was no accident that “Fear not” was the opening strain of the angel’s oratorio.

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10).

Verse 9 tells us the shepherds were

“sore afraid.”

I used to wonder at this until I stopped to realize that the God I know and love today was
completely unknown to the world until Jesus came.

We think of God as a Father.

People of that time thought of God as an ogre.

To us He is someone to Love.

To them He was someone to fear.

They stood in terrible dread before Him.

They only knew of His judgement and nothing of His grace.

And therefore, it is no wonder the angel should begin his message with the words:

“Fear not.”

It is one of Satan’s masterpieces to deceive people by giving them a picture of God as one who is stern and unrelenting.

Satan knows folk cannot love that which terrifies them.

A parent may beat his child into submission and the child may obey him because he is afraid. But the parent cannot frighten the child into loving him.

Satan knows that. Satan knows we cannot love what we dread, and so, he paints the God of Grace as

a hard,

unforgiving Being,

who will not hear the cry of the prodigal, and

who has no pity on the repentant sinner.

But, beloved, God is love. This is the message of Christmas. If Christ’s coming did nothing more than tell us that, it was still the primary event in history.

“Fear not”

was the glad and happy news that God is Love.

No longer do you need to make God the object of your slavish dread.

No longer do you need to stand afar off from Him.

“The word has become flesh.”

The God of Love has come to dwell with people.

No longer is there a flaming hedge and
a yawning gulf between us.

“Fear not, for behold I bring you great tidings of great joy”

is the angel’s way of telling us

God is not our enemy,
but our friend.

And, therefore, I speak with heavenly authority when I say:

You need not fear Him;
you only need love Him,
because He first loved you.

THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN’S JOY

This is the source of our joy as Christians.

Our joy is based on the knowledge that

He who made the heavens
has come to earth.

He who flung the stars in space
has been cradled in a manger.

He who is omnipotent
has been cloaked in swaddling clothes.

He who is the God of Judgement
has been seen as the God of Love.

So tell me! Could there be any greater cause for joy than this?

There are some who seem to think the Christian life is solemn. To hear them talk you'd think a smile was sacrilegious, and for Christians to be glad is inconsistent.

Surely, they have not heard the angel's song.

 Their message was one of joy.

 They brought *good* tidings.

And if the angels found cause to sing over the coming of Christ to earth,

 even though it was of no concern of theirs,

how much more should we who have experienced the joy of Christ's salvation raise our voices in a glad song of praise!

There have been many times I have wished for the voice of an angel.

 There have been many times I have longed to sing the glory I feel within my soul.

There have been many times I have wanted to lift my voice in an oratorio of praise to Christ, only to find my lips were dumb.

Well, some of us may have to wait until that glad and happy morning when we stand before our King until, with a voice celestial, we are able to sing a song the angels *cannot* sing.

 "Holy, holy is what the angels sing

 And I expect to help them

 Make the courts of heaven ring.

 "But when I sing redemption's story

 They will fold their wings.

 For angels never felt the joy

 That my salvation brings."

Another way in which

A Baby Makes A Difference

is that the coming of the babe of Bethlehem meant

THE END OF SIN AND THE BEGINNING OF SALVATION.

The second chord in the angel's happy song was even more lovely than the first. Luke 2:11 has been declaring:

“For unto you is born...a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

And that's what the shepherds wanted. That was the great need of the world in the year 1 BC.

A Savior.

Too long had the world listened to the voice of those who called themselves advisors, and they had advised themselves to the very brink of hell.

Too long had they been cursed with reformers who made this or that surface change in their manner of living.

Too long had the social engineers worked feverishly to adjust the wheels and pulleys of society's machinery.

Too long had they staggered beneath their load of sin without

any hope of help,

any ray of light,

any sign of life.

What they wanted, and needed, more than anything else was a Savior. They wanted and needed someone who could do for them what they could not do for themselves.

No wonder, then, that when the shepherds heard the angel's song, they were willing to leave their sheep.

No wonder they were willing to turn their backs upon the only thing of value they possessed.

No wonder they left all to go in search of this newborn King. They needed a Savior and they knew it.

These were the first prodigals.

These were the first to recognize the vast property of material possessions.

These were the first to leave all to follow Christ.

Oh, that we might possess a bit more of their wisdom!

You see, my friend, the willingness and extent to which you follow Christ is directly related to your awareness of your spiritual condition.

There are some who see the vastness of their need and are willing followers of the Babe of Bethlehem.

There are others who, blinded by the black light of their own morality, cannot see the great white light of Christ's redemption.

Have you ever wondered at the fact that the hardest people to win for Christ are moral people? How strange that these who love good and practice kindness should turn their backs on the very source of goodness and the epitome of kindness, which is Christ.

There are several answers to this riddle.

Primary among them is the fact that these folks have so gorged themselves on the hors d'oeuvres, they have left no room for the entre.

They have nibbled at the fruit of their own personal kindness which is nothing more than table decorations, and have thus dulled their appetite for the feast of inner righteousness which God has prepared for them in Christ.

Do you know who most appreciated the coming of Jesus?

Do you know who, more than any other, prays a prayer of gratitude
to God for His unspeakable gift this Christmas season?

I'll tell you.

It's the man who is most conscious of his sin!

The woman who fills her soul with thoughts of her own personal goodness will have no room left for Jesus.

But the one who sees his lostness,

the one who is alive to her spiritual need,

the one who feels the burden of sin and shame,

this is the one who, more than any other, knows that

A Baby Makes A Difference.

But there is another syllable in the angel's song. There is still another way in which this baby made a difference, for His coming meant

THE END OF DESPAIR AND THE BEGINNING OF PEACE AND HOPE.

It was a solitary angel which began the message of incarnation. But as his song of hope reached its highest note, Luke 2:13 tells us:

“Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of
the Heavenly hosts praising God and saying:

‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace,

good will toward men’.”

No greater song has ever been sung. No higher note of glory has ever been struck on the scale of praise.

To be sure, the sons of men *have* had their hours of gladness.

To be sure, they sang their hymns at the moment of creation when—in the beautiful language of (Job 38:7)—

“The morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for
joy.”

Yes, the world has had its morning melody

and its evening song.

But never before, or since, was there a song to equal this.

This was a glory oratorio. This was a midnight concert of angelic voices singing:

“Peace on earth...good will toward men.”

Oh, my friend, do you know what it means to be at peace with God?

Do you know what it means to be at peace with yourself?

Someone has said,

“Until Jesus came, there had been no peace since the day Adam sinned. Wars had ranged from the ends of the earth. People had slaughtered one another, heaps upon heaps. There had been wars within as well as wars without. Conscience had fought with mankind and satan had tortured people with thoughts of sin from which there was no remedy. There had been no peace, or hope of peace, since Adam fell.

“But now, when the new born King made his appearance, the very swaddling band in which He was wrapped became the white flag of peace. The very manger in which He lay was the place where the treaty was signed so that warfare could be stopped between a man and his conscience, between a woman and her God.”

Oh, my friend, this too is the message of Christmas:

There is the possibility of peace! There is a ray of hope!

This is the answer to those who would have us believe God is an ogre.

This is the answer to those who would have us see God as a morose being who is trying to take away our fun.

The straw-strewn stable
and the manger
are evidence of God’s good will toward people.

No greater proof of kindness between the Creator and His creation can possibly be given than when the Creator gave His only son to die for that creation.

That was the purpose of the incarnation.

That was the reason for Christmas.

That was the cause for Christ’s visitation.

He came to say to us what only God can say:

“Give me your humanity,

and I will give you my divinity.
Give me your time,
and I will give you my eternity.
Give me your weary soul,
and I will give you my redemption.
Give me your broken heart,
and I will give you my love.
Give me your nothingness,
and I will give you my all“
(Fulton J. Sheen).

Beloved, I don't know your heart.

I don't know the sense of burden and despair may be there.

But, this one thing I do know:

“The word has become flesh to dwell among us” (John 1:14).

And thus, where there is fear, there can be joy.

Where there is sin, there can be salvation.

Where there is despair, there can be peace and hope.

Against the darkness of whatever night you live in, there shines a star.

It is the star of Christmas.

And in it's dazzling light you can see

a stable,

a manger,

and a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

That baby is God's Christmas gift to you.

That baby is the answer to the dilemma of your soul.

Why not receive this gift?

Why not make room in your heart for Jesus?

Why not stretch your faith until you can see the bigness of God in the littleness of this Babe of Bethlehem?

You've tried the rest.

Now try the best.

And you will know what thousands of others have come to know:

A BABY MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

May God bless you one and all, and through this Babe that makes a difference, may each of you have:

“A Very, Merry Christmas.”