

Title: "Born in a Barn"

Text: Luke 2:1-12

If you haven't been with us the past couple of weeks, we are "re-introducing Jesus" this Fall.

-That is, in our preaching and teaching this Fall, we are inviting the writers of the New Testament to introduce us to the Jesus that they knew.

Last week, we looked together at a "hymn" of the early church that the Apostle Paul quotes in the second chapter of his Letter to the Philippian Church.

-It was a song that the early church sang in praise of Jesus, "who though being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, -but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant and being found in human likeness..."

-It's a song that proclaims and praises both Jesus divinity, "He was in very nature God," -and his humanity, "he was found in human likeness."

Today I want to look with you at the way the New Testament writer Luke introduces Jesus,

-at that moment when "He who was in very nature God" actually took on human flesh and was born as a very human baby.

-It's what we call the "Christmas Story," and it's a story you all know quite well.

-So I will only read you a small portion from Luke 2:1-12, but you know all the rest.

"This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

My friends, the Christmas story, which we re-tell every December, and sing of in Christmas carols,

-and have our children act out in Christmas pageants,

-and illustrate on Christmas cards we mail out in droves,

-it is the first example in Jesus' life of what that Jesus Hymn sung about and proclaimed.

It is the world's first introduction to the One,
-who though in very nature God, did not consider equality
with God something to be grasped,
-but made himself nothing and took on the nature of a
servant.

Philip Yancey, who is a wonderful Christian author, once
wrote about Jesus' birth highlighting four attributes by which
God introduces Himself to the world in the birth of His Son.¹

1. First, is the word "humble."

Now that is not a word that any of us would ever think to
start-with in describing God.

But look at the "sign" that the angels give to the shepherds.
-They have just told the shepherds that Messiah, the Christ,
"the Lord" has just come to earth to be the Savior of His
people,
-and this is the sign for them: "You will find a baby wrapped
in cloths and lying in a manger."

Now you and I are used to hearing that message proclaimed
as the sign for the shepherds to look for.
-But the shepherds would have thought that was the
craziest sign of the Messiah's coming they could ever
imagine.

I mean, a manger is a feeding trough for cows and donkeys.
-They would have thought, "What is a baby doing lying in a
feeding trough?"
-And especially if the baby is the Messiah, Christ, the Lord!
-Why in the world would the sign of the Lord's coming to
earth be that he would be lying in a feeding trough?

And they might have thought, "And why in the world would an
angel come and make this amazing news known to us?"
-We're just shepherds, and we smell like sheep dung and
smoke from the fire.
-Why would God send an angel to tell us this news?"

Well, it's because, when He who was in very nature God gave up his place in heaven to come and take on human flesh,
-he took on the nature of a servant,
-and came to us in great humility..."humbleness."

He was not born to a king in a palace in Jerusalem.
-He was not born as the son of a famous Rabbi at a prestigious synagogue,
-He was not born as the son of the high priest serving at the Temple.
-No, he was born of Joseph and Mary, a carpenter and his wife from Nazareth, a little village in the backwoods of Galilee.
-A couple who were not even married yet when Mary was found to be with child.
-A couple who had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem late in Mary's pregnancy, to register to pay taxes.
-It was a three day trip on a donkey over rough terrain.

And as you know, there was no room for them in the inn when they arrived in the little town of Bethlehem.
-So they ended up spending the night in a barn.
-And that's where they had the baby.
-The feeding trough was the closest thing they could come up with for a bassinette.

Humble. It was a humble birth. A lowly birth place. A low-income, blue-collar couple.
-The God who spoke all creation into being by His Word, and who sovereignly holds all things together by His power,
-he comes to earth in Palestine as a little baby, who could not speak a word, or eat solid food, and needed his diapers changed like every other baby,
-and was completely dependent on his teenage mother and carpenter father for food, shelter, and love.

It's all utter humbleness.
-That's how Jesus is first introduced to the world.

2. The second surprising attribute of God Yancey highlights from Jesus' birth is the word: "approachable."

“He who was in very nature God,” gave up his throne in heaven to come to us and was “found in human likeness.”

God made Himself approachable.

- He was no longer completely transcendent, above and beyond us,
 - rather, in Jesus, God came to be close to us, to live among us, to be one of us.
- He was no longer like fire and storm descending on Mt. Sinai causing his people to stay away and keep their distance.
 - Rather, he came as a baby, that shepherds and Magi alike were pleased to draw near to, and even to hold, and cuddle.
- He was no longer hidden in the Holy of Holies at the Temple.
 - Walled off from the people by a thick curtain.
 - approachable only by the High Priest, and that once a year.
 - Rather, he was a baby, and a boy, and a man, whom people of every stripe found eminently approachable.

Fishermen and tax collectors, women and men, children of any age, Samaritans as well as Jews, even Roman soldiers.

-It didn't matter who you were: Jesus was approachable.

3. The third attribute Yancey names as “underdog.”

And if that isn't a crazy word to use for God, I don't know what is.

“Underdog” is a word we use to describe predictable losers.

- Victims of injustice.
- People who have few advantages, and always seem to have the odds stacked against them.

It's hard to think that God could be counted among their number.

- I mean, by definition, God is great, and God is glorious, and God is powerful, and God is “over all.”
- How can God be an “underdog.”

But “he who was in very nature God” gave all of that up.

-He made himself nothing.

-He took on the very nature of a servant, (and the word in Greek is actually “slave.”)

Jesus, from birth, chose to take on the nature of the underdog.

-And in her “Magnificat,” Jesus’ mother Mary sings of this!

-She sings, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

-for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed...

-...for He has scattered those who are proud in their thoughts;

-He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the lowly,

-He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.”

You see, Mary had this revelation from the time Jesus was conceived, that He was to be born on the side of the underdog.

-That He was, in fact, to live as an underdog himself.

And indeed, as soon as He was born, King Herod set about to kill all the babies in Bethlehem to try and get rid of him.

-Jesus had to be carted off to Egypt to escape the murder.

When Herod died, and Jesus’ family was able to return to Israel,

-they lived in Galilee of the Gentiles, in the village of Nazareth, of which it was said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

-Jesus grew up having the whole town know that His father, Joseph, wasn’t really his father,

-and no one really knew who the real father was,

-so he was the illegitimate son of the town carpenter.

You see, underdog, underdog, underdog.

-Maybe that’s why all through Jesus ministry he showed a heart for the poor, the powerless, the outcast, the leper, the oppressed.

And ultimately, Jesus himself would be the victim of the world's greatest injustice ever.

-He who was innocent, would be unjustly arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified as a criminal.

The powers-that-be would have their way, and Jesus the underdog would be crushed by the sin of the world.

4. That's why the fourth attribute Yancey finds in the Christmas story to describe God is courageous.

It again, is an odd word to use for God.

-Does God, who is all powerful, need courage?

Well, maybe not when God sits on the throne of heaven in all his power and glory.

But when God chooses to give up that rightful throne and be born among us as a baby, that is a risky undertaking.

-The birthing process itself is risky as any mother can tell you.

-And being the infant in the birthing process is no picnic either.

-It's a good thing none of us can actually remember it!

And the life of an infant is risky, as is every phase of the human life cycle.

-All kinds of things can happen to us.

-Sicknesses, disease, Sudden-infant-death syndrome.

-And Jesus wasn't born in a hospital, you know.

-He was born in a barn!

-It's a wonder he and Mary even survived the birth.

-And Joseph was no doctor or midwife!

-What did he know about delivering babies?

See what I mean?

-The need for courage began with Jesus' first night on earth, and didn't end until his last.

-It took courage to go to the cross, and to take on the sins of the world, and to die for you and for me.

My friends, these kinds of words are what I mean when I say I want to re-introduce us to Jesus this year.

Maybe you've forgotten, or maybe you never knew,
-but who Jesus is far more surprising than the world ever
imagined,
-and than most of us even to this day expect of conceive.

Humble, approachable, an underdog, courageous.

He who was in very nature God, did not consider equality with
God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing,
taking on the very nature of a servant, and being found in
human likeness, he became obedient, even to being born in a
manger to a peasant couple from Nazareth..., and later even
to death on a cross.

The Apostle Paul calls us to have these same attitudes and
attributes in ourselves as followers of Jesus.

Are we willing to let go of our pride and to value humility?

-To actually learn to value "humbleness."

Are we willing to be approachable?

-To open up our lives, seeking to be more and more
transparent with one another?

-Not hiding who we are behind masks and curtains.

-But somehow letting the guard down, and being real, and
allowing others to know us.

-Approachable.

Are we willing to take the side of the underdogs of the world?

-To value the immigrant, the addict, the jobless, the
disabled.

Are we willing to ask for the courage to take the risks which we
sense Jesus is calling us to take to step out of our comfort
zone and follow him?

The Jesus of the New Testament is far more surprising than
we might have imagined.

-And he invites us to follow Him into a way of life that is far
more surprising than the life we imagined for ourselves.

Will you follow?

¹Philip Yancey, The Jesus I Never Knew, (Harper Collins, 2001)