

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray.

We love this story. Every bit of it, the parts that come from the bible and the parts that got added. We love to read it, we love to tell it, we love to act it out.

And it is a fabulous story, about God coming to the most unlikely people, into the most unlikely circumstances – not to a grand palace attended by servants, but to a frightened couple far from home, huddling with livestock to warm their newborn first-born, trying to keep him out of the night winds.

It's got just the right amount of danger and conflict and sweetness. Those celestial angels appearing to a rowdy gang of earth-bound shepherds, the highest of the high hanging out with the lowest of the low, as Jesus would. It's got peasants and kings.

The one person we don't hear from in this story is the person at its center: Jesus. We don't hear from Jesus till he's twelve, and that's just a short snippet. We don't really meet Jesus until he appears on the scene at the age of thirty, when his star begins to rise and seems to flame out within three years.

In this Christmas story, Jesus is at the center of all kinds of movements, but not directing any of them. From his miraculous conception, to his lowly birth, to his family's becoming refugees in Egypt to protect him from the ruthless and paranoid King Herod, Jesus is completely dependent, acted upon – we don't know when he took his first steps, what were the first words of the Word made flesh. He's just this cute little baby in all the pictures. But who is he?

Jesus wants us to know him. He came so that we might come to know who God is. The whole point of this story is that God came into our lives in a form we could relate to, have a relationship with. This utterly holy, "other" God came as a human person; the maker of heaven and earth completely vulnerable and limited, so that we might know God,. And all of that is just like fine china left in a closet, pulled out once a year on Christmas, if we don't give Jesus a try, if we don't say, "Okay, I want to know you, and be known by you."

I was in my twenties before I began to know Jesus as a person,  
because the church didn't tell me I could.

It told me all about him, but didn't introduce me to him.

When I began to know him, through developing a real prayer life,  
I learned that even though he's no longer around in a flesh and blood,  
he is alive and knowable through the Holy Spirit;  
he is still approachable in prayer, he can still talk to me.

I don't hear him with my outside ears, but words form in my mind that don't  
sound like me – they sound like him. When I hear, "I already love you the most;  
there's nothing you can or have to do to make me love you more because  
I already love you the most," that's not my voice. That's Jesus speaking love.  
When he nudges me to reach out to someone, or works through me to  
heal someone, that's his Spirit at work, making Jesus known.

If we're going to give Jesus a try, we have to come to know him  
as we would a new friend, or an old one – we need to hang out with him.

We can say to him, "Hey, I can't see you, but I want to know you.

And I want to trust you, even though I can't perceive you with my five senses.

And I want to work with you – I see you are still in the business of blessing people,  
blessing the poor, the wealthy, the sick, the healthy.

And you're still in the business of forgiving the unforgivable, and loving the  
unlovable, and bringing justice, setting people free and making them whole.  
and you're inviting me to join you in all that."

That's a prayer for those who want to give Jesus a try,  
see if this love we proclaim, this power is real.

I want you to grow in knowing Jesus, in coming to trust him, in living by faith.

If you want to know Jesus better, hang out with his friends here.

This is a community that is giving Jesus a try, learning to trust his guidance and  
promises, learning to surf on the waves of his Spirit in joy and freedom.

If you are hungry for more of Jesus, this church wants to see that you're fed.

If you don't have time for classes or reading, we'll make things available online,  
in posts and podcasts. We'll connect you with others who are giving Jesus a try.

This baby doesn't have any lines in our story tonight, but man,  
he has a lot to say to us if we tune in.

Do you want to get to know him better? Let's give Jesus a try.

**Amen.**

**Luke 2:1-20**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”  
<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.