

The Second Sunday after Christmas  
Sunday, January 5, 2014  
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Adoption has always been one of my favorite ways to tell the story of a family. Growing up, I was surrounded by family friends and relatives who chose to adopt their children. Their processes were always intriguing to me: the waiting, the home studies, the matching, the waiting, the travel, more waiting, and finally, the bringing home. And I noticed how adoption stories changed since I was a little kid—as a little kid, I remember being told the full details of some of my friends' or cousins' stories. But in the last decade or so, I've noticed a shift towards not telling the entire story. Rather, the story is left to the child to share or not share as he or she gets old enough and can choose what people know about them.

I wonder what we would have missed if Jesus had been the one in charge of telling the story. We are told the story by Gospel writers who never knew an infant Christ. In today's story, we hear the most amazing tale of a family formed through birth and adoption, who draw together in love to create a safe haven so that Emmanuel might become who he was born to be. We hear a story of a new trust offered from God to God's people.

It's a bit of a strange shift in our stories. All through Christmas season, we were spending time with Mary and her new baby. Infants are adorable, I grant you (except for the throwing up part and diaper blowouts), and it seems so calm. Suddenly, wise sages are being warned in dreams to flee from Herod to keep the baby safe, and the next paragraph has the flight to Egypt, in which Joseph the adoptive father of Jesus is again visited by angels and told to take his brand new family and run to a foreign land. The story has changed. This is no longer a gentle children's story about a baby, but a story in which human beings have to take risks to keep their beloved safe.

There's an interesting legend that goes with the gospel today. When I lived in Oregon, we were visited by the Dean of St. George's College, Graham Smith. He told us a story of a little niche where legend holds that John (the Baptist) was hidden by his mother Elizabeth as a baby. Some versions of the Nativity story tell that when Herod discovered the Magi had tricked him and were not going to reveal the location of the Holy baby, the enraged king ordered the slaughter of all male babies under the age of two. Joseph, being warned in a dream, had fled to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. But the infant John wasn't with them. So, as Dean Smith tells us the legend goes, Mary's cousin Elizabeth had to hide John. Because obviously, we know that John grows up to become this wild, ranging baptizer. Think about it—according to legend and scripture, both John and Jesus as infants were in danger. Like all babies, they were vulnerable as infants. Like all babies, they needed the protection of a human adult to care for them and feed and nurture them. And more importantly, they needed humans to protect them from actual danger.

Somewhere in this great story, parents biological and adoptive had to take a great risk to keep their child safe. I'm sure that you who have kids could imagine yourselves as fierce as tigers if you had to protect your child. The wise sages, Joseph, Mary... all of them took steps to protect the infant with whom they had been entrusted by God.

Isn't that an interesting thing that God did for us? Trusting someone with your child is huge. I'm sure that some of you have known parents who are reluctant to let anyone else hold their baby. I dropped my sister when I was 9 years old, and to this day, I have a relative who refuses to allow me to hold her babies. (For the record, since the age of 10, I have had a 100% perfect no-drop rate of baby holding.) God is not that type of parent. God shows us the most incredible trust with his precious and vulnerable child- even in the face of a world that would not be gentle. What can he possibly hope for us to do with that trust?

God doesn't simply love us or care for us or want good things for us: God also trusts us with Godself. To me, that demonstrates an investment in a relationship where our hearts and minds matter. Clearly, God's plan for God's people is quite unique. God's plan for God's people was re-imagined in trust and love. I also deeply love the involvement of Joseph. I hear way too much about how mother-love is the best kind of love and how those who are mothers know how to love in the way that the rest of us can't. Well, as a non-mom, I suppose I'll never know that sort of love. That's exactly why I love that God chose to insert himself into a family that was both biological and adoptive- to prove to us that love transcends mere biology. Love is a choice, a trust, a saying yes. How can we respond as human beings to that great trust, when God gives us God's own self Incarnate?

God trusts us enough to touch us, to reveal Godself to us. God trusts us enough that he believes we are good enough to protect his infant son. God trusts us enough to prove to us that adoption and biological families are his own choice- he trusts enough to dare to offer his love to all people. In the chaos and mess of birth, there is the deep love of a mother. In the visits of the Magi, we hear the soaring prophecies and we know the trust of wise people. And in Joseph's care for his family, there is trust and a fierce love. If mere human beings can love and trust that much... it gives me great hope that God considers us worthy of his trust as well. God trusts you with his own self. What can you do with that trust?