

## WHERE DID THE BABY GO? A Sermon for Christmas Eve, 2009

Where did the baby go?

Increasingly, it seems to me, Christmas is becoming a celebration of itself. It's a time to be happy *that it's a time to be happy*. It's a self-referential holiday. There's just something about this time of year. Looks like Christmas, feels like Christmas, must be Christmas, so let's celebrate.

Let's restore the baby.

Baby Jesus, of course.

But also another baby. The baby that *you* used to be. That baby may have been born twenty-six years ago, or forty-nine, or sixty plus. Or twelve. That baby may have been born in December, but chances are not.

Where were you born? In a hospital, at home? Perhaps somewhere in between? Did you have a rocky start in life, or was it your birth smooth? Did you cry a lot, or were you like Jesus, "no crying he makes"? Did you weigh six pounds, three ounces, or 7-14? (Back then, *every* ounce of you was precious.) Did you have more hair when you were born than you have now? Were you a privileged *first* baby, with a mother and father beaming upon you with pride, excited at the novelty of being parents? Or were you farther down the line?

Now that you have "Baby You" in focus, let me ask you again, "Where did the baby go?"

You were so full of promise (and not much else). You were cuter than you are now. It made people smile, just to look at you. Back in those days, people would reach out and touch your cheek, they would stroke your hair, and say—how perfect! They would look at your long fingers and just know you would grow up to play the piano. What a miracle you were! How perfectly marvelous!

Where'd the baby go? Do you play the piano? Have you realized all your parents' dreams? Did everything work out?

Back then, you were content with next to nothing—which is what you had. It took little to amuse you, or make you smile. People would make goofy faces, or bounce you on their knee, or give you a few spoons of mashed sweet potatoes, or change your diaper, and you were very pleased.

Where did *that* baby go? Do you settle for so little? Or is satisfaction always out of reach?

Life has had a lot of years to work on some of us, with definite effect. We are not as universally adorable. People are not as amazed at what we can do, even though we can do so much more!! As hard as we have tried to do well, to succeed at life, to reach the stars—it seems the stars have moved farther away; the bar has been raised. Some of us are old enough, and have been through enough vicissitudes, that we would be happy if we could once again just *walk* well. But if we did, everyone would take it for granted. Oh, if only it were enough once again, to do so little. If only there were a way to bring back a little of the baby.

Where did baby Jesus go? You know. After several years of innocent childhood, and years of apprenticeship to his father Joseph as a carpenter, he became a preacher and healer. He was fawned over by some, but flattery never went to his head. He was despised by many, but scorn never made him doubt his calling. He blew the whistle on the supposed representatives of God on earth, and they hanged him on a tree. He died, he was buried . . . and he rose.

His calling? The point of his life? The point of his humiliation and death? The point of his resurrection and ascension?

To bring back the baby in you and me. To allow us, this is what he called it, to get born all over again—this time “from above.” To restore us.

For the Father in heaven is not pleased that babies with bright futures turn into men and women with dark burdens. The Father in heaven is not happy that the sheep of his pasture have so little in common with the little lambs of spring time. The Father in heaven is distressed that “to grow up” and “to grow old” have become curses. He never meant it that way.

So, a child has been born for us, a son given to us. Authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father,” “Prince of Peace,” . . . and “Jesus.” Increasingly, people will accept his authority because they will recognize that this is the one and only king who can bring everlasting peace. Justice and righteousness finally have a standard-bearer, and his name is Jesus. One who grew up without ever getting old.

So this is the way it will always be. Always. Really. Always. For by his stripes we are healed. Restored.

Jesus makes us babies again. Not in a physical way—Nicodemus said once, that’s impossible! We can’t be born again that way!—but in a more important way. He gives us fresh birth certificates with our own names on them; he washes our face. By the forgiveness of our sins, by reconciling us to the Father in Heaven, Jesus makes us once again “simply wonderful.” He makes us adorable. The Father reaches down from heaven, touches our cheek, and smiles. Never mind that we are hardened by 59 years of struggle, or that we are scarred by sins past—God is pleased, and we know by looking in his face that we are pleasing to him. For all we know, what God is seeing in us is . . . a little baby.

In fact, he is. Only, the baby he sees is his own Son, because you and I have been linked to his child when we were baptized. Yes, the baby in us *is* Jesus.

Where did the baby go? Nowhere. The baby is still here. You and I still are . . . that baby we were long ago—just grown up, that’s all. We are each, still, the amazing handiwork of a loving God. We are still lovable. We are still beloved. We are still God’s children. Let’s restore *that*.

What a gift it would be, if we were able, as adults, always to feel as adorable as we ever were, because we were wrapped in God’s love.

What a gift it would be, if we were able to see each *other* that way. Not viewing each other critically, identifying each other by our faults, but as God’s children.

We can see this way because a particular baby has made his home in our hearts. Baby Jesus has not gone away. He's grown up, yes, he is Lord of all. But he's still right here, and always will be.

"Ah, dearest Jesus, holy child, prepare a bed, soft, undefiled, a quiet chamber in my heart, that you and I may never part."

Amen.

