

## Christmas Day

### Luke 2:1-20 – *Our Vulnerable God*

What is it that makes Christmas so compelling? Perhaps it has something to do with babies. After all, that's what we sing about — a baby lying in the straw. Yet the Gospel writers tell us very little about the baby himself. Luke sums it up in one simple sentence:

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger...

That's it. We aren't told his birth weight, what he looked like, the colour of his eyes, or how well he slept. It's a very abrupt statement about the birth of the world's Saviour. Yet, this child holds our attention... I wonder why.

A newborn baby is among the most vulnerable, helpless beings on earth — utterly dependent on others for everything. In contrast, what we know best is power. We seek it, we fear it, and we distrust it, because so often power wounds and destroys. Power shapes human society. But here, in this child, there is no power as we understand it — only powerlessness. God utterly vulnerable. God dependent.

The contrast between worldly power and the way God acts is astonishing. One writer puts it like this:

Mary holds her finger out, and a divine hand closes on it. The maker of the world is born a begging child; he begs for milk, and does not know that it is milk for which he begs. We will not lift our hands to pull the love of God down to us, but God lifts his hands to pull human compassion down upon his cradle. So the weakness of God proves stronger than humans, and the folly of God proves wiser than humans.<sup>1</sup>

Love is God's greatest instrument. Love is the ultimate expression of divine power. God's answer to human pride, God's response to our destructive ways, is not to force or overwhelm, but to meet us as a child — with vulnerable love. God meets us "by weakness, not by strength; by need, not by bounty."

The mystery of God becoming human is God's longing to be loved by us. In this child — defenceless, dependent — all distance between God and us disappears. Who can fear an infant? So often we speak of God in majestic terms: all-powerful, all-knowing, almighty. But today, what do we see? God powerless. God dependent. God-with-us as a baby, in a manger.

John's Gospel leaves no doubt about what is happening: "The Word became flesh and lived among us." The Word — who was with God from the beginning, through whom all things were made — becomes a fragile, vulnerable child. The power that spoke the universe into being is now contained in tiny hands that reach for a mother's touch.

What was God up to? Perhaps it's because a child is something we understand. Something we've all been. Even the most sophisticated, power-wielding adult knows, deep down, that there's still a child within. A child draws out compassion and tenderness. A child melts even the hardest heart. And this child — wrapped in cloth, lying in a manger — draws from us the best we have to give. Because this child needs us, and we respond.

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<sup>1</sup> Austin Farrer, *A Faith of Our Own*, pp. 41-42

We look at a newborn and see a symbol of life and hope. Every birth is a miracle — a unique person coming into being. We almost take this everyday miracle for granted. But in Jesus' birth, God offers this miracle again and again: new life, fresh beginnings, love that will not let us go.

We gaze on the newborn Jesus with love and wonder. We see Mary hold out her finger, and a tiny divine hand closes on it. The Creator of the universe, the Word made flesh, cries for milk, cries to be held — and our hearts are warmed. This child needs us, and we respond with the love we were made to live. God needs us, and we may choose to answer. In this moment, God lifts up small, defenceless hands and draws from deep within us all that we were created to be.

Gracious God,  
on this day of wonder, we pause before the mystery of your love —  
love that comes to us in fragile flesh,  
love that chooses vulnerability over power.  
As we gaze upon the child in the manger,  
draw us into the depth of your compassion.  
Teach us to welcome you with tenderness,  
to answer your need with our care,  
and to live as bearers of your light and peace.  
Through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

*Alister Hendery*  
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