

**SLD12.25.16 Christmas Day**  
**Emory Presbyterian Church**  
**Luke 2: 8-14**  
**Jill Oglesby Evans**

**Luke 2: 8-14**

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, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!'

**“The Whole Scoop”**

No doubt you got the memo – J. C. was born last night. Again. 7 lbs. 6 oz., 19 inches, Apgar 8 (it was cold), normal delivery, mother and child doing fine. For now, anyway. Certainly the angels are ecstatic. And the shepherds - this boy clearly appears to be one of their own. Joseph's relieved that mother and baby are doing okay. And Mary, well, she's just glad the whole things over. Well, except for the kings. Word is that the kings are on their way, so she'd better pull herself together and at least brush her hair.

But on the whole, Christmas morning dawns a happy day, even when you have to show up at church.

But you know that old saying about how nothing's as good, or as bad, as it seems at first? Notes one of our Advent devotionals – the one about Christmas carols – “As wonderful as Christmas morning is, serious events lie ahead.” Because, as we all know but tend not to think about a whole lot on Christmas, once Jesus gets born,

there's a Second Act – his ministry. Then a *Third* – his death and resurrection. And finally, the *Epilogue* – his return as Redeemer and Reconciler.

But why think about all that on the first day of a baby's life? Why, when the gurgling sweet thing is right there cooing up at you, let your imaginations wander to, say, the acne and angst of adolescence? Or getting into college? Or getting out of college? Or the arthritis and angst aging? Why, on the day of a baby's birth, even consider all that latter day misery?

Like some of our Christmas carols do – include allusions to Jesus' latter day misery even as they celebrate his birth. As our music-based Advent devotional put it: "Some carols tint the Bethlehem scene with the shadow of the cross."

I'll give you some examples:

1 What child is this, who, laid to rest,  
on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Nails, spear, shall pierce him through;  
the cross be borne for me, for you.

1 It came upon the midnight clear,  
3 Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
the world has suffered long;  
beneath the heavenly hymn have rolled  
two thousand years of wrong;

The first nowell  
Then let us all with one accord  
sing praises to our heavenly Lord,  
that hath made heaven and earth of nought,  
and with his blood our life hath bought.

3 Good Christian friends, rejoice  
with heart and soul and voice;  
now ye need not fear the grave:  
Jesus Christ was born to save!

Or, that most dismal of Christmas verses from 'We Three Kings:'

“Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume  
breathes a life of gathering gloom,  
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding dying,  
sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

What’s up with that? Don’t we just sing over these downer verses without paying them much mind? But what if they’re there for a reason? Maybe the same reason every seven years or so Christmas Day lands on a Sunday, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the day of resurrection. So that, even while celebrating the birth of baby Jesus, we’ll pause a moment to remember of the *Whole Scoop* of the Gospel.

‘Cause the *Whole Gospel Scoop* not only invites our hearts to melt at the advent of a little bitty baby, but also to grow and deepen with his teachings as he, and we, grow up. Then, the *Whole Scoop* invites our hearts to break, like Mary’s did, at Jesus’ tragic death on a cross. But then, then, at Jesus’ resurrection, to allow God to mend our hearts (since we cannot.)

God comes as a baby to die on a cross? Some call this goofy scheme the ‘scandal of the particular;’ others just call it ‘nuts.’ Add a few more lines about resurrection and return, and you and I, we call it ‘faith.’ What a people of paradox, we are, celebrating the birth of a baby, fully aware of the acne, angst and arthritis around the corner. Jubilating over new life despite the fact that that we all know death invariably tags along. And how, knowing what the future holds, can we Christians so fearlessly welcome the fruit of God’s womb? Because we know the *Whole Scoop* of the Gospel, which includes the promise of the empty tomb.

We’re not Pollyannas. It’s not that we don’t see the hurt and anger and pain in the world, in our families, in us. It’s just that we see the bigger picture. The larger story. The *Whole Gospel Scoop*, which requires that Alpha and Omega, birth and death, good

and bad, darkness and light, be glued together, in the same moment, the same prayer, the same breath, the same loving, divine embrace.

Sure, nothing is ever as good, or as bad, as it seems at first. At least until you know the full story, see the big picture, get the whole scoop. Which is that God had the wild idea of becoming one of us, living within and among us, and saving the world through us.

And just how does God go about doing this?

In a recent article, Tom Tewell notes that “God comes into our lives in the ordinary moments...no drama...no bright lights... no cameras.<sup>1</sup>” He goes on to describe a metaphor used by the 16th century German theologian, Martin Luther, who explained that Jesus Christ’s birth is an example of left handed power, in a world where right handed power is paramount. Right handed power, Luther said, is the power of numbers, size, military might, and notoriety. It’s the power of hierarchy where some are exalted and others are put down. It’s the power of force, of money, of glamor, of success.

Left handed power is very different. Left handed power is the power of love, of forgiveness, of sacrificial service, of pjs in church on Sunday morning. Luther said that left handed power is the most powerful force in the world because it defines true greatness, not as one who lords it over others, but as a servant. (See Matthew 20:25-28) Summarizes Tom, God’s left handed curveball is that the baby born in a manger in Bethlehem...is the Savior of the world! In Jesus, God breaks through and points us in a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://macedonianministry.org/gods-left-handed-curveball/>

new direction; not one of chance or blindness but one of ever-deepening wholeness in love.

An example to me of God's left-handed power is the recent safety pin movement through which people identify themselves as willing to stand with others who are oppressed. Okay, maybe not so recent. When I sent out the email about the email, Heather asked me if I'd been living under a rock, as it'd made the rounds on facebook ages ago. Okay, so I'm behind. But some stories bear repeating, like the birth of Jesus, or, as I see it, the safety pin narrative, especially when they reveal the Whole Gospel Scoop, the new direction that leads toward an ever-deepening wholeness in love. So, today I'm wearing a safety pin, and inviting you to wear one, too, inside or out. Like I said in my email, this is a safety pin kind of congregation. On our better days, we do get the Whole Gospel Scoop, and live out of it.

So pick up a safety pin on your way out. It ain't much but it's as good a symbol as anything I know of God's left-handed power. Even the part that pricks.

To the glory of God. Amen.

Some people are wearing **SAFETY PINS**.

In a very unsafe world people are wearing safety pins to identify themselves as someone who will help. Maybe like...

If you are a refugee, I'll take up your fight.  
If you are a survivor, I'll believe you.  
If you are LGBTQ, I won't let anyone tell you you're broken.  
If you are a woman, I'll make sure you get home okay.  
If you wear a hijab, I'll sit with you on the train.  
If you are trans, I'll go to the bathroom with you.  
If you are a person of color, I'll stand with you if you need me.  
If you are a person with disabilities, I'll respect what you can do.  
If you are an immigrant, I'll help you find resources.  
If you need a hug, I've got one for you.  
If you need me, I'll be with you.  
All I ask is that you be with me too.