

## AS A CHILD

**Psalm 126**  
**Luke 1:26-31**

**Faith Community**  
**December 11, 2005**

### Introduction

Christmas is about the birth of a baby. A child is born. God comes to us as a helpless infant. God doesn't come to us as a strong, tough, no-nonsense leader, but as a baby. God didn't come playing with power as we humans do – I'm tougher, stronger, better than you – but as a helpless child. God came as a baby, a vulnerable, powerless child, needing to be held, fed, and changed.

#### I

Christ began as we all begin, as a purple, crying, helpless newborn. As we grow up, we lose that child-like sense. We go to school and start vying with other children for grades and respect. We grow older and look for popularity. We begin a job and try to get ahead while struggling with our values. What really matters in this life, and what doesn't?

As we get older, things fall apart. At about 40, the eyes start to blur. What we once saw clearly is now a little fuzzy. We get checked for glasses because the eye muscles are getting weaker, the eyes are less flexible, we have more trouble focusing.

After a few more years and we have more difficulty hearing. As we age, everything becomes weaker; most of us become less flexible. For many people our minds become less flexible too. And then, well, it doesn't get any better as time goes on.

It takes more to surprise us. We are less filled with awe. Much of that child-like awe has passed us by. Can you remember what it was like to come down on Christmas morning as a child? Do you remember being so excited you could hardly contain yourself?

#### II

We are taught that we won't be successful until we grow up. We think we won't be smart until we've gone through school. We don't think we can be wise until we are mature. We can't have faith until we understand.

Yet our faith teaches us that we aren't really wise until we go beyond all that to become childlike again. For Christians, being successful also means being vulnerable. We aren't really successful until we move beyond the need for status and are filled with wonder at what God has done. To have faith is to have a solid understanding of the world and thank God for the mystery of it all.

An anonymous writer has suggested that our life is backward, and should be lived in the opposite order:

“Life is tough. It takes up a lot of your time, including all your weekends, and what do you get in the end: a watch and a pat on the back from the boss. I think that the life cycle is all backward. You should die first so you can get the unpleasantness out of the way. Then you live 20 years in an old age home. You get kicked out when you're too young to be there. You get a gold watch and go to

work. You work 40 years until you're young enough to enjoy your retirement. You go to college. You party until you're ready for high school. You go to grade school. You have no responsibilities. You become a little baby and go back into the womb. You spend your last 9 months floating, and you finish up as a gleam in somebody's eye."

Remember the riddle of the sphinx? What animal crawls on all fours, then walks on two legs, then finally crawls on all fours again? The human!

Being a child is an important phase of life. When we lose our childlike sense of awe, we have lost a great deal.

### **III**

Sometimes we come to God best when we are most childlike. Often we are open to God when we are vulnerable. When we get over our impatience, we can open to receive the God who came to us as a child.

Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son? The youngest son asks for his inheritance, goes off into a far country, and squanders all his money. Then he realizes that his father's servants live better than he does, so he decides to go home and asks to work as a servant for his dad. The father receives him as his lost son and throws a great party for him.

What would happen if the son went off and became very successful? What if he invested his money wisely and made a ton more money. What if he gained prestige, had power, was a big wheel? What would happen then?

I wrote a parable about that once. The father writes to his son asking him to come home to visit, but the son never does because he's too busy. At the end of the parable, the son's wife asks if they couldn't go to visit his father. The son responds, "What do I need him for?"

Sometimes our vulnerability makes us realistic about our relationship with God.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus told us that if we want to enter the Kingdom of God, we need to become like children. We are to be childlike, not childish. Jesus was referring to our need for wonder and awe at the mystery of life. As William Willimon has said, "Here is a kingdom with a very small door. You can't get to Jesus unless you turn and become as a child. And that's good news because at this time of the year, that's what happens to us all."

The Advent season brings out the best in us because it takes us back to the wonder of being a child again. We can stand at the manger as mature adults being overwhelmed at the mystery of what God has done. Can we recapture that childlike wonder?

Amen