

RE-ENCHANTING CHRISTMAS

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Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

It is the third Sunday of Advent during my second year of seminary.

My best friend calls me with exciting news. “It’s a boy!” she says. “We could finally tell with the last sonogram.” I am thrilled and ask for more details. “Well, the most amazing thing,” she says, “is that we could see all four chambers of his tiny, precious heart on the sonogram monitor. Each one was opening and closing, closing and opening, as his life blood flowed throughout his body, which was floating inside of my body. It’s a miracle,” she says. “I think I’m finally excited about being a mother.”

She has not always been this excited about being a mother. This pregnancy—her first—came quite a bit earlier than her careful planning had anticipated. The draining fatigue of morning sickness has depleted her petite, athletic, marathon-running body just at the time when she and her husband are packing up all of their worldly possessions to move halfway across the country in the muggy August heat.

In September, she calls to say she is adjusting to her new home and is starting to feel well enough to get out of the house and meet people. In October, she calls to say she has applied for a few jobs and in November, she calls to say she has finally broken down and bought maternity clothes. Then in December—the third Sunday of Advent—she calls and says, “*We can see all four chambers of his heart opening and closing as his life blood flows through him.*”

And in that miracle she realizes why she is excited about being a mother. And in this moment, I realize why I am terrified of Christmas.

I did not know that I was terrified of Christmas. I thought I was just annoyed by it all. I am talking about the secular Christmas, of course. The one that funds our consumer economy, the one that places so many pressures on us that seem to be so unrelated to the real meaning of it all. I thought I was just frustrated by what Christmas has become in a culture of excess and escapism.

But in this moment, as I am talking with my best friend about the miracle of her baby, I realize I am terrified of the *religious* Christmas. I think most of us are. I think we are terrified by what it means about God. Because if we believe what we say, if we believe that God comes to us as a baby—like the one my friend saw on the sonogram monitor—then that means that the God of Christmas is far more vulnerable than any of us want to admit.

That means that God is like every other baby: floating in the womb of its mother, protected by *her* body, completely dependent on *her*, whether she’s ready for it or not.

The Shepherds might “come a-runnin’,” but this pastor is ... um ... a-fleeing!

Until the following Sunday – the fourth Sunday of Advent – in the middle of the Christmas pageant ...

There are no babies in this tiny congregation. There are only two children! We have a baby doll already placed in a young adult Mary’s arms. But literally, just as Mary is ready to make her entrance, another member of the congregation shows up with her baby nephew. Completely out of the blue.

It is “meant to be,” we decide. So we shove aside the doll baby Jesus and shove in the human baby Jesus. And they are off down the aisle, to “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed ...”

The pageant goes on.

Mary holds the very human baby Jesus and loves him and cares for him as she stands on the stage behind me. But he is heavy. Literally sinking through her arms. And without thinking, I offer to help, and without thinking she passes him to me. From her arms to mine.

And, as all parents know, suddenly nothing else matters.

Baby Jesus is fussy, so I have to stand and rock. Baby Jesus is tired, so I have to lull him to sleep.

And the amazing thing is that he is holding me, while I am holding him.

And the world in all its chaos, for one brief moment, has been made right by this all-powerful, vulnerable, *enchanted* baby.

The proud have been scattered.

The lowly have been lifted up.

The hungry have been filled with good things.

And in this moment, we are all caring for the vulnerable, powerful, enchanting God of Christmas.

And we are all at peace.