

Luke 2:1-8
“And Mary (Was) Delivered”

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“While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.”

There is, perhaps, no more disturbing a statement than this. If you’re Mary and it’s Christmas Eve and you’re in Bethlehem, there is perhaps nothing more disturbing than to know the time has come for you to deliver your child.

I remember when my wife and I were expecting our first child. We were not disturbed. A little nervous maybe. As with any firsts, there was so much we didn’t know, but we also felt like we had so much going for us. By that time, we’d been married for 4 years. We were both fortunate enough to have worked full-time for all those years and so we had a little money saved up in the bank. We had friends of similar ages who had recently delivered babies of their own, and we’d learned a bit about what to do and what not to do from watching them become parents. And we had *the book*, the New York Times Bestseller: “What to Expect When You’re Expecting.” Moira read the entire thing. I mostly read the pages about food cravings and mood swings.

On the day we found out that we were going to have a baby, we actually went online and bought tickets to fly from Virginia—where we were living at the time—to Boston, so we could share the news with our parents and brothers. But of course, we made sure to book our return flight with plenty of time to spare. We knew that when the time came, we wanted to be near *our* hospital and *our* doctor, and sure enough, when the time did come for Moira to deliver, and our daughter, Lillian, arrived, we were.

But not Mary. The story goes that when it came time for Mary to deliver her child, she was in Bethlehem, and in Bethlehem there were no rooms in any inns, let alone in any hospitals. It might have worked out okay. Sometimes it does. We’ve all heard stories about mothers who have to pull over to the side of the highway, and there in the back of a police car, surrounded by bumper to bumper traffic, it happens. Or on an airplane, 30,000 feet in the air, and doctor or no doctor, the baby comes and it all turns out okay. But that’s not Mary. She wasn’t on her way to *Women and Infants* with her insurance card in her pocket when she realized she just wasn’t going to make it. She wasn’t flying to Florida or home for the holidays, just hoping she had one more trip in her without a diaper bag for a suitcase. In going to Bethlehem, Mary is going to a place she doesn’t want to go to, at a time

when she shouldn't have to go. That she and Joseph are going anyway is a sign of the times they live in. As residents of 1st century Galilee, they live in a world where someone else is always in control, where someone else gets to decide when you come and go. In this case, that someone is Rome and Emperor Augustus, who has decided it's time to take a census of his kingdom, to see if there is anyone out there he isn't taxing enough, anyone he can tax some more, and this means everyone must return to their hometowns to be counted. That Joseph and Mary have to go to Bethlehem is nothing more than a sign of hard times. That while they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child, must have been a great disturbance.

On the other hand, it must also have been a great comfort. That while they were there, in that place where neither Mary nor Joseph wanted to be, in that place where they felt the bottom had fallen out from beneath them, in that place of confusion and anxiety and disappointment and powerlessness, far away from the securities of home, Mary, the young virgin, is delivering up something new—a baby—a sign not of hardness but of hope.

German theologian Eberhard Arnold points out that when the angel appears in the sky overhead in Bethlehem on Christmas night, "The angel does not merely say that Christ is born; he says, 'for you,' for you he is born. He does not say, 'I bring news of great joy'; he says, 'to you, I bring news of great joy to you.'" Might the greatest joy of Christmas be that while they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child?

I wonder if we might do something while we are here. I mean, something even more than singing and praying and rejoicing in our children. Because I know where some of you have come from. Like Mary and Joseph, we have come from places where we have not wanted to be, but nonetheless are. We are out of jobs. We are drowning in the anxiety of difficult relationships and marriages. We are part of countries that every day seem closer to war than to peace. We are caring for loved ones with illnesses way beyond our healing powers. We see the hungry, we see the bread in our own hands and know the hope in our own hearts, but we are not sure it's enough. We are scared. We are tired. We are in Bethlehem. And being in Bethlehem as we are, I wonder if we might do something. The Bible says that it was while Mary was in Bethlehem that the time came for her to deliver her child. But that's not telling the whole truth about Mary. The truth is—and I imagine every woman who has ever given birth knows this—the truth is that it wasn't just Jesus

who was delivered on that first Christmas night. It was also Mary. And if it was Mary then it was also Joseph, and if it was Joseph than it was also the shepherds, and if it was the shepherds than it was also the angels, and the animals too. And if all these, then why not also you and me?

You see, we are the ones who are being delivered in Bethlehem tonight. From our loneliness and longing, God has come to be with us, to deliver us to love. And if God has come to love you, and God has come to love me, then may it also be said that we have come to love one another. Amen.