

A Little Child Shall Lead Us

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St. Augustine's Chapel

Every year we drape shiny fabric cinched with cords over children's bodies and entrust them with the Christmas drama. It is the only ritual the church leaves in their able hands. Every year in sweet perfection they tell the story of the Lord's birth before an adoring congregation who temporarily abandon all judgment, doubt and worries as God's love magically takes on flesh and blood before our eyes. Every year we swaddle a baby momentarily called Jesus and the baby blesses us and we allow our hearts to recall the humbling and unbelievable story of a poor virgin birth in the midst of a violent political struggle as Love becomes incarnate in this world. It is the beginning of our good news and it makes sense that a child has to lead us in this truth.

I drove away from the home of Oscar where I had offered a blessing and a prayer of thanksgiving for his life a few days ago. Oscar's mom and dad already have that exhausted and beautiful new parent look. Barely a week old he has already restructured their schedules, moved their office, cluttered their kitchen, ceased all other news, almost broken their hearts so they can widen enough to make room for this new person, and brought family from distant lands to adore him. As I backed out of their drive on the small street just off the interstate with not a Christmas decoration in sight, the truth that a child shall lead us made its way from the recesses of my memory into the richness of living in my heart. Of course it would have to be a lamb to lay down with a lion, a sheep would be too stuck in his ways to ever believe it is possible to make peace. We have to be like the lamb to believe that a defenseless and trusting baby is the prince of peace with power to change the world. Without fanfare on holy nights babies born under starlit skies change the course of our lives forever.

"O holy night, the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear Savior's birth! Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'til He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope, the weary soul rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born! O night, O holy night, O night divine!"

Visions of babies that can teach us how to live in peace and love can renew our hearts. There was a nine month old named Natalia, traveling with her mother on the second leg of an airplane trip who took a fancy to my husband's watch. During the course of the flight, we learned the mother was Puerto Rican, had two other children, lived in New York and traveled back and forth as part of the Homeland Security Department. Over cooing and playing with watches, we talked about politics, statehood for Puerto Rico, music and religion. What we held in common was adoration for her beautiful Natalia, so all the conversation was peaceful. A little child has to be the one to move us out of our corner and into new spaces that we don't claim as our own. Babies, naked and poor, who belong more to God than to us, remind us of how we will return to our creator.

Two weeks ago in the paper there was a picture of a baby almost starved in her mother's arms. She is part of a sea of news about the starvation sweeping Zimbabwe. She is caught in the horrific economic crisis, Mugabe's corruption that mirror's Herod's, and a relentless drought. Her name is Godknows. Oh my Lord, Godknows. Godknows is God's holy child. God knows the meaning of suffering. God knows we have allowed the suffering of innocent children caught in our ambivalence, fear or hatred. God knows the suffering of babies should scatter any pride we have and makes us pray for mercy. The song of Mary is for Godknows.

Oscar, Natalia, Godknows, and all our babies lead us to the truth of the good news of the Gospel. Into this broken world a

child is born. This Holy Child, the incarnation of Love, can turn our hearts to flesh and bring peace. This Child can bring us to our knees in that kind of gratitude that moves us beyond our doubt into our hopes. We can believe that with our whole hearts. Our king was a poor baby born into poverty. Born to a poor mother whose faith and love led her from the stable to a cross. This child has to lead us, it is our saving grace.

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