

## The New Relationship

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

I wonder what the shepherds thought they would find when they went into Bethlehem? The angel said that a baby will be a sign but the shepherds didn't say to each other, "Let's go and see the baby" – they said "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." I wonder what they were expecting? I also wonder how they found the right place – unlike the magi they had no star to guide them – how did they find the stable where the baby wrapped in bands of cloth was lying in the manger?

We are so used to this story that it no longer seems as surprising as it would to people hearing it for the first time. It no longer seems surprising that God ushers in a new era in human-divine relationships with the birth of a human child in a stable in a little town in a little region in a little country, with the only fanfare heard by shepherds and the only tweet read by foreigners.

If I were God I wouldn't do it like that!

I think if I were God, I might put a book in every library, and then every home would receive a shorter edition – in the language of the people who lived there – and there would be podcasts and tweets and it would be all over social media with a great little video that would go viral and of course all the news stations all over the world would carry it as headline news. But what exactly would that news be?

Christianity is here! Woohoo! A new ethical system has been unveiled! A new philosophy has been declared which will transform everything! Probably a good thing I'm not God, huh?

It was a glorious and wonderful thing when 500 years ago people began to be able to read the Bible for themselves and declared “sola scriptura” – only the scriptures are necessary, only the scriptures are life-giving. But somewhere along the way we began to think that the book was more important than its message. And we spend hours and months and years talking about what the book might mean. Philosophers try to develop systematic philosophies, ethicists systems of ethics and theologians systematic theologies, all based on the ideas in the scriptures. But their efforts falter. Why?

Because what the shepherds found that night in Bethlehem wasn't a book or a theology or even a world religion. What they found was a baby being loved by his exhausted parents.

A newborn baby wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Big deal.

But it is a big deal – God started the new covenant, the new relationship between humanity and God not with a wordy declaration but with a new little person whose eyes at first didn't focus and who needed to wear the 1<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of diapers. God started the new covenant with a little human being who would turn out to be both God and human - A human being who in himself brought heaven and earth together.

The new relationship – the relationship foretold by the prophets when they said that God's law would be written on our hearts and all people would be drawn to the glory of God's coming – that new relationship is begun with a little one who needs human protection and human milk and human nurturing to grow into his human manhood.

This new relationship between God and humanity starts with the Christchild dependent upon humans... just as we are dependent upon the Christ who was there at the beginning of Creation and is still here in

every part of the universe – the Christ who is the living energy that animates all things. That Christ, upon whom we are entirely dependent for the life which sustains and moves us, comes to us as a baby in a cattle trough.

Our faith is not about ethics – how we should behave, what we should do – nor is it about philosophy – it's not even about systems of belief. It IS about people – about how we relate to God the three in one. God comes to us in a way that we can relate to. God comes to us as a baby.

We are of course at a slight disadvantage as we develop this relationship...

The newborn child who grows into Jesus the Christ, who will show us by his life and teaching and the manner of his death, not to mention his resurrection, how to live and how to be in loving relationship to God – that newborn child is not physically present here today except in our figure of mother and child in the creche. Jesus does not walk the streets of Los Osos in a tangible human form.

Instead we have words written thousands of years ago which point us to the Christ, and we have God's Spirit who constantly reveals Godself to us.

Which gives us an astonishing advantage. Only a few people could know Jesus really well when he was in everyday human form. Perhaps as many as 5,000 men plus women and children heard him preach. But he was limited, as we are, to time and space.

The Holy Spirit takes away that limitation. We can go in our imaginations to the stable in Bethlehem and see the Christ child but we don't have to be physically close to Jesus the Christ to walk his path and come to know him.

Because whenever we are ready, the Holy Spirit reveals God to us, through scripture, through creation, through the sacraments, through each other. And when we are unsure whether we are listening to God's spirit we can compare the ideas we are hearing with what we see in Jesus who never picked up a weapon even in self-defense, who spoke out against injustice and showed us how to live a life of peace-making, giving and forgiving, sharing love, sharing food.

The Holy Spirit will lead us into the way of the child of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, God with us. The Holy Spirit interprets the ways of God to us so that we too may become holy children of God, sisters and brothers of Jesus.

My friends, this joyful evening when we remember the little child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger, this is just the beginning of the new covenant. If we leave Jesus there, frozen in that moment of tender innocence, we have forgotten what it was all about. The real meaning of Christmas is not the baby in the manger, not the angels singing or the shepherds rushing. The real meaning of Christmas is the new relationship of mutual love offered to humanity by God the three in one.

Tonight, let us with Mary ponder these things in our hearts and open ourselves to a new experience of the Christ, taking up the offer of a new relationship with God.