

December 24, 2017, Christmas Eve

Luke 2:16 (“baby”)

Small Christmas

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Of all the baptisms I've been privileged to perform as a pastor, the most memorable took place in a hospital neonatal unit in New York. A member of my former church gave birth, very prematurely, to triplets. I visited them shortly after the delivery. No one was sure these tiny little babies would survive, so we all agreed they should be baptized. They were so small that, one by one, I held them in a single hand, and baptized them with water from a sterile bottle in the name of the Triune God. It was many years ago, but I can still see in my mind Dominic, Jillian, and Grace, and how very, very small those babies were on their baptism day.

Some infants are smaller than others, but all babies are small, aren't they? Even the largest of babies is still a tiny little thing. And so was Jesus. The Son of God, the Prince of Heaven, was so small.

Have you ever noticed how the first Christmas was small, in so many ways? The baby? Small in size. Bethlehem? Small in population. Joseph, the carpenter? Small in wealth and status. Mother Mary? Small in life experience and mothering skills. The manger? Small and smelly in providing hospitality. Even the heavenly angels? Only a small crowd of shepherds heard them sing. And those shepherds? Very small in reputation and trustworthiness, in the world's eyes.

We read the story of the first Christmas, and it's rather shocking just how small everything was.

Why so small? Why did God do it this way? Why didn't he blow everybody's minds? Why didn't God Almighty turn his

Son's birth on earth into a huge, gigantic, colossal spectacle that no one could ever dispute or possibly disregard?

Something really big that like would have been easier for people to believe in, easier for doubters to sign on to. Had Jesus come down to earth in some super-sized, splashy, spectacular fashion, wouldn't it be so much easier for people, like our agnostic, atheist, non-churchgoing friends and neighbors, to accept this Jesus as Lord and Savior?

Well, here's the thing. God's goal is not to make things easier for us. God's one goal is to rescue us from our sin. And the only way for us to get saved is to do it 100% God's way. It's to trust 1000% in Christ alone. The only way for you and me to be rescued from our sin is to make ourselves smaller than small, and to ever-so-humbly trust that God has done it all for us in Christ. Because whatever you think or do is not going to get you saved. Whatever you decide about God, or commit to in your heart and soul, is not going to get it done. You're still going to be a sinner.

But God has rescued you from your sin. He sent his Son into our flesh, into our humanity, and Jesus took all of our sin on himself to the cross. He died to pay in full for your sin. God did all that. Jesus accomplished that whole ginormous, massive act of salvation.

Do you believe it? Do you believe God's got you covered? Faith in Jesus seems like something so small. Surely we can accomplish that. But no. Even believing in Jesus is something too big for us. Belief? Trust? Faith? They don't come naturally to sinful humans.

But God helps us believe. God's mighty, immensely-powerful Holy Spirit is always at work in our hearts, sparking faith, nurturing faith, protecting the faith that saves us. And what a huge gift that is! Working through Word and Sacraments, God leads us to Jesus, and to faith in Jesus.

I watched it happen in Dominic, Jillian, and Grace's lives. Those triplets learned about Jesus as they grew. And God's Spirit helped them to believe. It was a joyous day when I watched them stand up on their Confirmation Sunday, all grown up, big kids, and speak of their belief in Jesus, their Savior from sin.

And here we are tonight, because we believe, too. We hear the story of the first Christmas, that small Christmas so long ago, and we believe that baby came for us. We believe that Jesus is our Savior. We believe that he came to share all of God's love, forgiveness, and blessing with us.

I'm convinced, friends, that God made the first Christmas so small as an act of love, as an lesson of faith, for us. God was setting a pattern. "We're going to do this my way," he was telling us. "We can only do this one way. My goal," God was saying, "is to rescue you from your sins. So, right from the start, in sending my Son, I'm not going to try to make it easy for you. Right off the bat, you're going to have to have faith. I'm sending my Son in this remarkably small way, so that, right from the start, your relationship with him and your understanding of him has to be based on faith."

And on this Christmas Eve, God is saying to you and me, "I'm not trying to wow you. I'm not here to blow you away, or to bowl you over. I'm not going to do anything big to make it easier for you. But I'm going to help you tonight to start believing in Jesus."

That little baby, so small? Your Savior, Lord, and King, taking on your flesh. That little town of Bethlehem? A reminder that your God values the humble, the lowly, the small. Those shepherds? A lesson for you, that your God accepts us all, even social misfits who are small and insignificant in the eyes of the world.

Thank God for the first Christmas, for that small Christmas!
And thank God for this night, a night to believe in your
Savior, Jesus! Merry Small Christmas! Amen.