



# ST. JAMES' CHURCH

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## Sermon for Monday, December 24, 2007 Christmas Eve 5:00 p.m. Lessons and Carols The Rev. Brenda G. Husson, Rector

This is a story about presents. And babies.

Babies first. That seems appropriate doesn't it? The thing about babies is you either love them or you don't. Fortunately for most babies, their parents are predisposed to love them. If you're not the parent and don't find other people's babies particularly winsome, it helps to have a phrase at hand when the cooing starts. The one that works every time and for every baby, the cute ones and the ones who arrive looking a tad more like wizened old men than really seems fair, is this: "Yep. That's a baby!" Say it with the right tone and the parents will swear that you marvel as they do. And you? Well you'll still have your more sensible judgment and your integrity intact.

That will work for you as an outsider, but what about the baby's siblings? Sometimes they're thrilled by the newest one's arrival. But sometimes isn't always and then the comments can be quite interesting. My favorite story is of the older sister who welcomed her baby brother quite cheerfully for the first few days and then announced it was time for him to be returned to the hospital. Informed that the baby was non-refundable, she stalked out of the nursery declaring, "Then tell him he has to get a job!"

Lucky for Jesus, he was the firstborn. No pesky siblings, only adoring if exhausted parents, and animals stabled with them making no comments at all. But this baby, new the truth of that older sister's words: everybody needs a job and this baby came into the world with his already lined up. But back to this baby in a moment.

Presents. Who doesn't like to get presents? We all have our lists, but the irony is that the gifts we often remember best are the ones we didn't ask for. Even more, the ones that serve no earthly purpose. There is a high wisdom, as one writer has put it, "of completely inappropriate gifts" for "the best gifts of love are those that demonstrate a lovely lack of common sense." \* They are the gifts that demonstrate the giver's trust that we are a person of grace and good humor, even when we know both are in short supply. The gifts that suggest we are wise or elegant, when we know such words aren't really apt. They are those rare gifts that make us laugh out loud

and that sometimes make us cry. They are gifts of love. And they have nothing to do with our lists and everything to do with our need.

Our need to be beloved. Our need to know we matter. Our need to be seen as better than we are or as good as we wish we could be. They are the gifts of love, inappropriate and ludicrous and lovely all at once. They are the gifts we never asked for or expected; they are the gifts we treasure most of all.

The story of this night is the story of a baby. The story of this night is the story of the present we didn't ask for and perhaps don't think we need. Jesus is the baby and Jesus is that gift.

For his job, this newborn cradled in straw, is to show us God's love, in ways we would not have thought possible. To be God with us and God for us. So he begins by being born as we all are and into a home so frail and makeshift that not one of us can think our place too poor to welcome God. First a birth and then a childhood, that he might grow as children always do. To grow as children do, first one step and then another. To walk this earth and work. But then to manifest the gifts of God in human form. So he heals and teaches, feeds and forgives. Some will not want such gifts, either for themselves or others, preferring those enumerated on their own lists. Choosing power rather than forgiveness, choosing control rather than love. And because those with power and control do so often get their way, through their efforts, Jesus will give the last and final gift: his own life freely given, dying as we do. Foolish and extravagant to the last, dying for us the final demonstration of his profound lack of common sense. Dying for all those he loves and dying too for those who will not love. Dying that we might know that even in our dying we are accompanied by love. And then finding in his resurrection that love, absurd and foolish as it is, will not die. Will not quit. And life is ours forever, a gift we would never have dared to hope for.

Tonight we remember the most ordinary thing. A baby being born. It would be easy to overlook. Like some small, unnoticed present tucked away at the back of the tree. That once opened, proves to be the one you were hoping for. The gift of God's ludicrous, everlasting love.