

A communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, December 24, 2009, 11 p.m., dedicated to my staff: Denny Mahoney, Marty Worth, Mark Williams, Sharon Leidheiser, Jamie Bobb, Stan Parron, and the Rev. Barb Cunningham, who have served this church faithfully and well and who make Christmas come alive every day at First Church and always to the glory of God!

“ . . . Stand in Awe ”

Luke 2:1-20

**(Part V of V in the sermon series
“For a Time Such as This . . . ”)**

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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News Flash: **“Babies R US”** is opening an outlet on the Northwest corner of Ninth and Broad in downtown Columbus! Due to a baby boom hitting the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, 444 East Broad Street, the time is right for a downtown location coming in early 2010.

Senior Minister, Rev. Tim Ahrens, was quoted this week, *“I told you we were a loving church! There are babies everywhere. Babies are moving in and taking over.”* He continues, *“With 15 babies born this year, we are blessed with new joys and a steady crawl to the baptismal font. Move over Beethoven. Mozart’s lullabies are back in vogue!”* Details to follow on the 5 a.m. broadcast!

Newsflashes aside, it is true! A baby boom is upon us! Ten babies have been born since August adding to the five others born earlier in the year. One by one, I have made a pilgrimage to the cribs of our newborns. Each time, I have found half-awake, sleep-deprived (but smiling) parents. Each time I have found beautiful boys and girls stirring the hearts of all around them. Then, one-by-one, the newborns have ventured out and made their own pilgrimage – carefully placed in the latest safety seats – finding their way to church.

There is even more great news about all our babies this Christmas Eve!

We have the most beautiful babies in the whole world right here in our church! They are magnificent! Some are long. Some are short. Some are hairy. Some are bald. Some are active and expressive. Some are still and peaceful. But each one of them is disarming and each one is absolutely gorgeous in every way. Each one shines God's light right into our eyes. Each one is "God with us" all over again. Each one is an absolute joy!

"Babies **ARE** US!" this Christmas Eve in our growing downtown church. (Keep your eyes on the Confirmation Ccass of 2022). Of all nights of the year, this is the night to celebrate babies. In Jesus of Nazareth, born in a barn and laid in a feeding trough, God finds a way to approach humanity so that we no longer fear God. The first announcement of Jesus' birth comes to the shepherds from an angel of the Lord. "*Fear Not! A baby is born tonight!*" Rather than hide or run away, the shepherds leave their flock and run to the stable in Bethlehem. They can't wait to see God in human form. They come and they stand in awe.

Could God ever be less scary than when embodied as a baby? Think about this for a moment. Have you ever really imagined God as a baby? Immortal, invisible, almighty, all-powerful, the creator of the universe – **as a baby**. Imagine God giving up language, muscle coordination, the ability to eat solid food and control the eternal bladder. If we ever wonder again about God's emptying God's self to

come among us, take a good look at a newborn baby. The sight of one so small and innocent is the presence of God most mortal, most visible, most tiny, and most powerless and most vulnerable.

Our God, born this night as the newborn Christ is disarming. But, God is not disarming for everyone. Jesus' birth in Luke's Gospel teaches us another lesson. When God comes to us in human form, those who prefer the power of earthly rulers and military might are utterly and absolutely undone by the "word of God" born and dwelling among us in human form. The King Herods, Quiriniuses, Ceausecus', Pol Pots, Bin Ladens and Hitlers of this world are stricken with fear at the sight of one who rules God's world through love and vulnerability. The thought of losing their power to the powerless and vulnerable ones of this world is more than the desperate despots and dictators can face. Rather than lose their false power to God's Chosen One, these men choose to wipe out all of God's children within their reign of terror.

Just beyond the stable doors of Bethlehem, are those who stand ready to destroy all that is good. There is no awe in them. They seek to destroy what God has created in the womb of wonder. They seek to destroy that which is awesome!

But God will not allow the destruction of all that is good and vulnerable in this world. The spirit of our disarming God, our newborn Savior, is a spirit that overcomes the evil of this world. God's love growing out of the heart darkness is reflected in this Christmas poem written by German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

This was Bonhoeffer's last poem written on this night 65 years ago, just months before his execution at the hands of Adolf Hitler. This Christmas poem, written to his fiancée, Maria, his parents and brothers and sisters, ends with these words:

*If it be thy will again to give
joy of this world and bright sunshine,*

*then in our minds we will past times relive
and all our days be wholly thine.*

*Let candles burn, both warm and bright,
which to our darkness thou has brought,
and if thou can be, bring us together in the light.
Thy light shines in the night unsought.*

*When we are wrapped in silence and profound,
may we hear that song most fully raised
From all the unseen world that lies around
and thou art by all thy children praised.*

*By kindly powers protected wonderfully.
Confident, we wait for come what may.
Night and morning, God is by us. Faithfully
and surely at each new born day.*

Tonight, come to the manger of Bethlehem. Behold our disarming God. Join him as he lives, grows and shines God's light on a world waiting to be born. For such a time as this, come stand in awe. Amen.

