

“What Do You Do With a Baby?”

a message by Dr. Bruce Havens

BASED ON THE THEME, “THE COMFORTS OF CHRISTMAS”

Arlington Congregational Church, U.C.C.

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Luke 2:1-20 [NRSV]

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Iwonder how many of you, when you were new mothers, arrived home with your new baby and thought: what do I do with this baby? I can imagine a first time mother who hasn't had any special training, maybe didn't even spend much time babysitting as a young teenager, and thought, “what do you do with a baby?” I'm sure a few new fathers have felt that way too. And

no doubt a few older siblings would like to suggest that what Mom and Dad do with the baby is give it back.

Probably every new mother and father, when they find out they are to have a baby, have heard someone say to them, “your life will never be the same.” The impact of any baby is immeasurable. How about the impact of this baby, called Jesus, whom we know as Lord and

Savior? What impact will such a baby have on our lives?

Christmas, of course, revolves around this baby named Jesus. I can imagine that Mary, a first time mom and with all the incredible, amazing, miraculous facets of this birth may have wondered, “what do I do with this baby?” This baby, whose birth we celebrate grows up – the story didn’t just jump from his birth to his ministry, even though we know little about those intervening years. Mary had to care for that baby named Jesus just as any mother would.

Whether you have ever had a baby or never will have a baby, I want to suggest that what we do with “baby Jesus” is very similar to what we would do with any new baby. I want to suggest that, at the very least, there are three things we want to do with any baby, and the same is true with this baby called Jesus. You may say these things are obvious. I would agree. What I would ask us all is, are we doing these things in our relationship with Jesus, this baby who grew up and is worshiped as Savior and Lord?

The first answer to the question is, you nurture a baby. How do you nurture a baby? Obviously we must take time – we must spend time with the baby. With most babies we would physically cuddle and hold and feed it. Take time tonight, as we ponder the mystery of this baby born in Bethlehem, to reflect on your relationship with Jesus. Have you been nurturing it? Are spending the time you need, in order to let him grow in your life and be the blessing he wants to be to

you? Promise yourself that you will nurture that love in the coming year. Here’s what will happen if you do: the living Christ – the one who came as the baby Jesus – will nurture you in the years to come. This is part of the miracle and wonder of Christmas.

The second thing that you do with any baby is to learn from it. Yes, we teach babies everything we can. We help them learn all that there is to learn. But I tell people all the time that my children have taught me more about what matters than I have from all the institutions of higher learning from which I have earned degrees.

One key thing I want to remind you of is that learning means growing, which means going beyond our current attitudes and ways of believing and living. As a baby grows we too grow as parents. In the same way we can grow as Christians as we learn from this Christ child.

It is clear that this is a more difficult time for more people than any time in the last fifty years. The economy has left many people hurting. The politics of our day are so polarizing that it seems no one cares about working for the common good, only for the good of themselves and those like them. When times are hard it is easy to become angry, bitter, grasping, and selfish. We can become so fearful, and anxious that God’s love can’t flow into us or through us.

The alternative is to learn more about God’s love. As we do we will grow spiritually. I believe that will teach us how to be more compassionate, more

generous, more gracious. If we let hard times harden us our souls will not grow. Our spirits will shrink in fact and make us more fearful and anxious. I believe that one of the key things that we can learn from this Christ child is how to grow spiritually. We can choose to be more generous and gracious and in so doing grow more liberated, more free than we ever would be by our grasping and grabbing out of fear and anxiety.

One of the messages I heard from many in my parents' generation, who lived through the Great Depression of the 1930's, was that everybody was in it together. Generosity, even when you may have had little yourself, was more the order than the exception. I think it is time we nurtured that attitude again. I think that is the message of love that this baby brings to us this Christmas Eve. The love of God is not just for us, and those like us, but for others especially for those who are hurting. If we take this to heart then we will truly experience the love and joy and hope that this baby brings.

Finally, would it be too obvious and repetitious to say that the third thing we do with any child and especially with this Jesus-child is love it? One of the things I think we forget about love is that is meant to be something we enjoy. A long and meaningful relationship with a child has its difficulties. It has its ups and downs, that is safe to say. I want to encourage you to find ways to enjoy all your love relationships, but even more to find ways to enjoy the love that a faith relationship with Jesus Christ can mean. Have you been struggling spiritually? Are you dealing with a grief that has

made you angry with God? Have you been separated from God and somehow feel guilty and unable to repair that rift? I want to share with you "good news of great joy to all people." Jesus Christ was born to show us the incredible depth of God's love for us.

Have your images of God been ones that have made it difficult for you to believe God loves you, and is on your side? Have you ever held a baby in your arms and felt the love that flows from you and fills your heart love, joy, peace, and hope? That is what Christmas is all about. God returns that love in the same way a baby does.

It is wonderful that we take time to make Christmas special for children. After all, the center of it all is the story of this baby who has come to us. But let us not forget to let this baby grow and to grow with him. Let us nurture this baby, learn from this baby, and love this baby as we celebrate the good news of great joy at Christmas. AMEN.