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I John 1:1:1-4
CAN I HOLD THE BABY?

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Christmas is a time for family. And when families get together, there is nothing more exciting than a new baby. Sometimes the baby is not brand new. The baby was born a number of months ago, but most of the family has not seen the baby yet because the parents live many miles away. There is a lot of anticipation. What does everybody want to do? They want to hold the baby. The excitement is there; first the grandparents, then the aunts and uncles, finally the other children. Perhaps the parents are a little nervous, but they are assured that everyone will be careful. It wasn't that long ago that they were nervous. That new baby seems so fragile. Everybody gets their turn. The parents don't have to worry because everybody wants to hold the baby.

We have come to another Christmas Day. It is a time for family, the very family of God. And we have a baby here with us. That baby is named Jesus. He will bring us joy and peace and love and happiness. As we see him we ask, "CAN I HOLD THE BABY?"

Every birth is a miracle of life. You know as first time parents the joy of seeing your new baby. You know how wonderful it is to hold him and touch him. You count the tiny little fingers and the tiny little toes. You are filled with love. The baby we visit this morning is also a miracle but an even greater miracle than any child we have had. This child is God himself in human form.

Think about that for a second! When we think of God, we think of attributes that our human minds cannot even begin to comprehend. God is eternal, without beginning and without end. God is omniscient, knowing all things. God is omnipotent, possessing all power. God is omnipresent, filling all things. God is unchangeable, remaining the same today, tomorrow and forever. And now God enters the world as an infant born in time. He will set aside the use of his divine power for a time, in order to live a life of humility. He will grow in knowledge. He will be confined to a certain space and time. And he will grow into manhood. That is truly an unbelievable miracle, yet we know it is true.

When we know that our baby is coming, we will put a lot of preparation into his arrival. Mom will choose her doctors, her obstetrician and the child's pediatrician. For months she will visit the doctors who will tell her what to expect. She and her husband will probably attend childbirth classes somewhere along the line. They will read up on what to expect. Dad will probably start getting the baby's room ready. He will buy a new crib and paint the room. They will buy toys for the baby to play with. Showers will be thrown for the new parents who will get clothing and supplies and diapers.

There was a lot of planning that went into the birth of the baby Jesus. Way back when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, God promised a Savior who would come from the Seed of the woman. He would crush the head of Satan. Adam and Eve were overjoyed at that news, but the Savior would not come immediately. He would come when the time was right. Thousands of years would pass, yet God would keep assuring his people that the Savior would indeed come. More and more details were added as the centuries passed.

Most parents today already know whether they are going to have a boy or a girl due to ultrasound monitors. When our children were born we did not know what God was going to give us. We only prayed that he or she would be healthy. Mary and Joseph both knew that their child was going to be a son. They were assured of that fact by angels from heaven. They not only knew that they were going to have a son, but they knew the name that they would give him. He would be called Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins.

Mary and Joseph would not have their son in their hometown of Nazareth. The Roman emperor Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that a census be taken of the entire Roman world. Because Joseph was a descendant of King David and because David's hometown was in Bethlehem in Judea, some 90 miles away, they would make the long trek to Bethlehem. Bethlehem was known for producing sheep for sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem a few miles away. As you know, there was no place for Mary to have her baby, so he was delivered in a stable just outside of town.

The child was not placed in his own bed in his own room. There was no doctor to deliver him. His first room was a stable and his first bed was a manger, a feeding trough for animals. And yet this child was the very Son of God. He came in humility. As St. John says in his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." That is something absolutely unbelievable, yet we believe it because God tells us so.

Yes, the Word became flesh. God became a baby born in time. We can hold him in our arms. We can touch him with our hands. He is real and he is ours! John writes in his epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us."

Why do we love babies so much? Because we don't have to work hard to get the baby's approval. It doesn't matter whether you are black or white or red or yellow. It doesn't matter whether you are from Israel or the United States or Canada or China or Africa. It doesn't matter whether you are a multimillionaire or you don't have a nickel to your name. It doesn't matter what house you live in, what kind of car you drive, what kind of clothes you wear. It doesn't matter whether you have multiple degrees from major universities or you dropped out of high school. It doesn't matter whether people view you as a success or a failure. Babies are there to give their love.

Your past does not matter to a baby. You can think of some stupid things you did when you were a child or when you were in high school or in your younger days or yesterday. That does not matter to a baby. Put away your guilt. Pick up the Christ child and hold him in your arms.

That is what so many people did. Think of the shepherds who were watching their flocks on that first Christmas night. They were everyday people with everyday problems. All of a sudden there were angels from heaven announcing to them: "Fear not, for I bring you good news that will be of great joy to all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord!" They didn't worry any longer. They left their flocks and ran to the manger where they would find their Savior. Sometime later the aged Simeon would pick up this child in the Temple and hold him in his arms and proclaim: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." A short time after that, Magi from the east visited Mary and Joseph and brought gifts of gold, incense and myrrh, gifts fit for a King.

What child is this who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping? We wonder about our children and what will happen to them in this world of violence and sin. We think, "Will he make a difference in this world?" There were many times when I stood by my baby's crib, thinking about my child and praying for him or her. We know what the Christ child would do. He would fulfill the meaning of his name. He would save his people from their sins. That is the reason, the very purpose of his birth. He came to be our Savior.

We cannot forget that Jesus came to save us. He came to do what we were unable to do and he came to undo what our sins had done. He came to reconcile us to God. He came to defeat sin, and death and the power of Satan. He would do that by his perfect life of obedience to his heavenly Father and by his atoning death on the cross. We must always remember that behind the cradle there is a cross. It was always there in the background. When that child grew up, he would do whatever it took to rescue you and me from our slavery. He would take our sin and guilt and pay the ransom price.

Sadly death is always around, even at Christmas time. The day after Christmas is the feast of St. Stephen, the first martyr who was killed confessing Christ as the Son of God. Two days later is the feast of the Holy Innocents, killed because King Herod wanted to snuff out the life of the newborn King. Yes, today, babies die, children die, young mothers die and the elderly die. But that is not the end. The Christ child would rise from the dead and destroy the power of death forever. Because of that, those people are now in heaven. Because of that we will be there also. John and others had touched the wounds of the risen Christ.

We want to hold the child. What a wonderful thing that is. There are times when we feel like an absolute failure, when we grieve and sob uncontrollably, when we think we can't go any farther. There is something about picking up a baby and holding it in our arms and holding it close to us, that makes our troubles go away, giving us strength and comfort. We have that baby.

The truth is that we don't hold the baby in our arms. He holds us in his. This is the crucified, the risen, the ascended Lord of all. He is our Savior. As the old song goes, "He's got the whole world in his hands!" May the Christ child bless us with his love! AMEN.