

Won't He Ever Grow Up?

First Congregational United Church of Christ

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When my daughter Laura was born in New York City in 1981, one of my colleagues in the United Church Board for World Ministries taped to my office door a full page ad from the New York Times. It featured a picture of a baby, with the caption, “Welcome to your \$180,000 investment.” I’m not sure what was being plugged by that ad: perhaps a life insurance policy, perhaps a brokerage service. But in retrospect, that \$180,000 was a deal I should have taken. But for my anonymous colleague the message really wasn’t about the money; the message was, “This child is going to change everything for you.”

This child—this child—the Christ child—is going to change everything for you, but only if you take the birth of this child in your life seriously. If you allow this child to change you, your life will be changed forever.

Often, at Christmas, we want to think ahead, to think about what will happen to this child—how he will bring healing and joy to the people whose lives he will touch; how he will challenge those who hear him to be more faithful; how he will be a magnet not only for love and hope, but also for the anger that is directed at someone who tells people things they don’t want to hear; how ultimately he will so enrage the political and religious authorities of his time that they will want to kill him; how they will subject him to a tortured death; how, having been the first Word, this child will have the last word about sin and death. How, in life and in death, he will open the doors of eternity to us.

But, for tonight, welcome this child as a child, a baby. When his mother takes him from her breast and hands him to you, saying, “Would you please hold the baby for a moment?” hold that baby as if you were holding all the love in the world in your arms, because you are. When you’re holding a baby in your arms, you are disarmed; you are as vulnerable as the child you are holding. And that is a good thing.

Whenever I have held my own babies or my grand-babies, I have been undone. Christmas, the welcoming of God’s child into our world should be a time when we’re all undone, and when we promise to be redone. Yes, he will grow up. But yes, he will always be a child, the child who comes to us as a baby so that we can be the ones to grow up. Phoebe sang it, and I will repeat it, “When God is a child there’s joy in our song. The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong, and none shall be afraid.” Amen.