

Christmas Day, Year B, 2014
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

This year
has been a year of babies here at St James,
and especially the last few months.
First was baby James, son of Kathleen and James,
and then Madison, daughter of Laura and Tim.
Then Jack, son of Jack and Sarah,
who played the holy family in our pageant last night.
And we're still waiting on Carmine and Jennifer's baby, due on Tuesday.

Each and every one of those babies
are beautiful
and precious,
and absolutely miraculous,
a gift of new life.

Which is what I imagine Mary and Joseph thought
when they first saw
their baby boy.

Sometimes
in the midst of all the Christmas hype,
we forget how much like
every other birth
that one
was.
Miraculous
and ordinary.
Mary and Joseph
were just two people among many
traveling,
all of them required
to go back to their ancestral hometowns
to be registered.
Mary wasn't the only pregnant woman,
though one of the few
that close to full term.
And when they arrived in Bethlehem
they joined crowds of long lost relatives

all looking for somewhere sheltered to stay.
In the end
they were lucky to find the stable;
compared with a shared inn
or a room in a family home, it was warm and safe,
and a private place for Mary to give birth.

And when the baby was born,
she wrapped him warmly
and put him in a makeshift cradle.

And perhaps they remembered
those visits they had from the angel,
announcing that they would have a child,
perhaps they remembered
that he was to be
the Son of the Most High,
God with us.
Or perhaps they were so relieved
to have a healthy baby boy
after that long and difficult journey
that they simply fell
asleep.

It was as miraculous
and as ordinary
as every baby's birth.

But it wasn't that way for the shepherds.
They were laborers,
out in the fields,
sleeping rough,
no sheltered stable for them, just the warmth of their sheep,
taking turns to keep watch
so the others could sleep.
But there was no sleep for them that night.
Because suddenly
and angel appeared
and God's glory
filled the air
and they were terrified.

And then the angel spoke

and told them about
a baby boy,
newborn
in the village
just down the road.
And you can imagine them scared
and confused
and wondering.
“What’s so important
about this baby?”

“This is no ordinary baby.
This
is a Savior, Messiah, Lord.”

“Bethlehem? Are you sure you’ve got the right place?
What’s he doing in a village like that?
It’s no place
for a king.
Shouldn’t he be
in Jerusalem, the city of God?
We wouldn’t even know where to look!”

“You’ll find him
in a stable,
a manger for his cradle,
wrapped warm and tight
against the cold.”

And then the darkness filled bright
with heavenly creatures,
and their song hung in the trees and the sky and the wind,
"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

And then
they were gone
and the shepherds were left
wondering if it was all a dream.
“What was it? Where did they go?
What’s all this fuss
about a baby?”

They're born all the time.
We would have known
if anyone important was pregnant.
Did you hear
any rumors?
And Bethlehem????"

And then they thought some more.
"Maybe we should go
and see. Just in case. If we can find him.
Does a Messiah look any different
from a regular baby?
Though they likely won't let us in.
No one ever wants to know us shepherds,
though they're glad enough of the milk and meat and wool our sheep give them.
But maybe we can pick up some food while we're in the village.
That way
it won't be a wasted trip."

And they went,
hurrying through the night,
until they came to Bethlehem
and found Mary and Joseph
and baby Jesus.
Who looked just like
every other
baby.

And they told their story,
and Mary and Joseph
remembered the other angel,
and wondered
about their baby boy.

And the shepherds wondered too.
Why it was
that the Messiah was lying in a feed trough.
Why it was
that no one seemed to have noticed.
Why it was
that they had been the ones
told to come see the baby.

And they went back to their fields,
laughing and talking
and telling anyone who would listen
about this baby,
this miraculous, this ordinary
baby.

They had met God,
and their lives had changed forever.

Sometimes we forget
just how miraculous
and how ordinary
this baby is
who we celebrate at Christmas.

Because this is God incarnate,
God made flesh,
God with us.

Somehow in this child
God
and humanity
are joined,
the miraculous
and the ordinary.

No longer remote from us, distant, aloof,
as befits one of great power and glory,
God took on human flesh
and became part of the world that he created.
God brought the miraculous
into the ordinary.
So that the ordinary
would be forever transformed.
Our lives
are bound up with God's life.
And we have met God.

And like the shepherds,
we get to tell the world
about this baby,
this miraculous, this ordinary

baby
who is Emmanuel,
God with us.