

The Quiet Revolution

[Isaiah 10:33-11:5](#)

Christmas Eve

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It is such a quiet story: A man and woman go to another town to pay their taxes. The woman is pregnant. Very pregnant. There are no rooms left in the inn, so the woman has to give birth to her child in the stables behind the inn. Not only is it a quiet story, it is also painfully ordinary. Ancient society had no birthing rooms. Women gave birth to children wherever they could: the back bedroom, the fields, a stable behind a crowded inn.

So another ordinary looking child is born to another ordinary couple in a very ordinary part of the world one quiet night. And everything between heaven and earth has changed forever.

When Luke tells us this story, he has to begin by telling us about Emperor Augustus and Quirinius, the governor of Syria. Those are the names everyone knows. These men have only to give the word, and everyone has to move, traveling to pay taxes. But there was no salvation coming from these illustrious, powerful leaders. No, salvation was born in a quiet, ordinary place. Like your life.

No one is really flattered to hear this, but most of the time, life is pretty ordinary for us. We have a few extraordinary moments along the way: Christmas, a wedding, graduation, promotion. We also have a few times of intense crisis. But most of life is spent, not on the mountain tops or in the dark valleys. Most of life is spent on the flat planes in the middle where we work, keep house, raise children, pay bills, and wade through mounds of laundry and piles of dishes.

You really don't understand Christmas unless you understand the difference tonight makes in all these ordinary routines. For it is into the common, quiet places of life that the Savior is born. At least, that is the promise of the prophet Isaiah. It had been a long, long time since the Hebrew people had heard from God. The era of the great prophets was long gone, as were the great kings and the great patriarchs. For centuries, there was just ordinary people living with a God who had chosen to be quiet for a long time.

Isaiah described Israel as a tall tree that had been cut down by invading armies and hard times. The people were spent financially, emotionally, and spiritually. Today we would say they were in need of vision. So Isaiah gave them a vision. Watch he said, not for the momentous or the extraordinary. But watch for your hope to emerge quietly like a shoot that comes out of the stump of a tree.

It is ironic that most of us have beautiful Christmas trees in our homes tonight. These trees that have been cut down and decorated are the symbol of our celebration. I wonder if old Isaiah would say that we are focused on the wrong part of the tree. Maybe we all ought to have tree stumps in our dens. Then we could circle the chairs around it hoping for a tender shoot of life to emerge. But I don't think that is going to catch on.

Nah, we like the decorated tree, because we want to make Christmas something special. We have family and friends huddled together. We've stopped work and studies for a while, and we knock ourselves out to have an extraordinary holiday. I understand this. I love this season. I love the presents and the shopping, the carols and the extra beautiful worship services. I love the decorated Christmas tree. It is a beautiful, glorious holiday. But very soon the family will climb on planes and leave. The presents will be put away, exchanged, or broken. And the beautifully decorated tree will be stripped bare and dragged out to the curb.

If this year, you would like Christmas to be something more than a distraction, and if you would like to find a miracle that endures through all the ordinary days that lie ahead, then look for the quiet revolution that is occurring tonight. Your Savior is born.

This may not sound so revolutionary. It may sound like it is just the same quiet, ordinary Christmas story you've heard a hundred times. But it can change everything, if you cradle the Christ Child to your heart. Until you do, you'll never be able to appreciate the revolutionary drama that is occurring this night.

Let me describe for you how this Holy Night looked from the perspective of heaven, two thousand years ago. This perspective is given to us in the 12th chapter of Revelation. That text says nothing about shepherds or wise men, but it depicts a dragon leading a ferocious struggle in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, wearing a crown of twelve stars, cries out in pain as she gives birth. Suddenly, the enormous red dragon descends as his tail sweeps away a third of the stars. He crouches hungrily before the woman, eager to devour her child after his birth. At the last instant, the child is snatched away to safety as the woman flees into the desert. The dragon is furious and takes his anger out on the other children who remain behind.

Now, the people of Bethlehem all missed that drama on Christmas Eve. All they saw was a humble country woman giving birth to her child. Some may have remembered that she fled to Egypt when she heard of Herod's anger. All would have remembered that Herod became furious and killed all the other children of Bethlehem.

From the perspective of many, tonight is just another year of Caesar, Quirinius, and Herod. It's just another ordinary year under the tyrants of cancer, boring jobs, and broken hearts. But from the perspective of heaven, there is high drama going on tonight.

Tonight we witness the birth of a new king whose kingdom has replaced whatever tyrant has blinded you to the holiness of your ordinary life! It may not look like so much hope tonight. It may appear as fragile as a newborn child. But the hope will grow. Just as the child became a man who saved the world, so will the quiet hope grow to save your ordinary life.

Tonight we will serve you the sacrament of communion. All you will receive is a small piece of bread and a little, tiny, cup. It doesn't look like much, but as the body and blood of our savior, this taste of grace will linger on your soul renewing you in a love from which you are never separated.

Last week, I and the other pastors took communion to our church's shut-ins. One of the men to whom I brought the sacrament has suffered through a debilitating disease that left him a nursing home for many years. His body shakes so much that sometimes when I see him, he cannot hold the cup. Other times he is so heavily medicated that, well, he cannot hold the cup. But this week, in a quiet voice, he said to me, the greatest miracle is not just that Christ died for me, but that he took on painful, shaky flesh. Then he slowly ate the body of Christ, and drank down the cup. And communed with the Savior who became like him. It was just a little ordinary thing. No, it was the extraordinary sacrament of grace reminding him that he was not alone. God is with us. Every shaky day is for us another experience in holiness.

There comes a time when you know you have to settle into your ordinary life, even if it seems shaky. Some do that out of fatigue or despair, because they have run out of distractions. The only people who settle into ordinary lives with joy are those who have finally defeated whatever dragon they have been battling through life: self-esteem, hurts from the past, broken hearts or broken dreams. I do not know what dragon you have been fighting in life, but I do know that Christmas can be more than one more distraction from it all.

Tonight we proclaim the great miracle that the Savior is born. The dragon will not consume our Savior. The Savior will, in time, consume the dragon. For those who believe that, nothing is ordinary again. Amen. Amen. Amen.