

**FIRST PARISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
East Derry, New Hampshire**

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The way I figure it, there were at least two miracles that happened on that first Christmas night. The first is that God chose to come among us as a small, fragile, dependent, vulnerable newborn baby. The second is that Mary, Joseph and the shepherds were open and responsive to such a marvelous mystery.

One of the pieces of this night that has always touched me the most deeply is the radical truth of the incarnation: God with skin on. We think freely about God sending the Son as the ultimate act of outreach and mission, a sweeping attempt to reach the human race that had stubbornly resisted God's other attempts to establish contact. I embrace that incredible gift, but for me this night goes further than that. This night, the first miracle that I celebrate is the phenomenal, incomprehensible wonder of the fact that the Creator of the Universe, the Ultimate Power and Final Authority chose to be a tiny baby boy - because of love. For the one who created everything from the Grand Canyon to Niagara Falls to a slab of granite to a lady slipper to a butterfly, who knows how to move mountains and part the waters of the sea, who can raise the dead and calm the storms, bring water out of a rock and turn a wayward follower into a pillar of salt ~ for this One to choose to come among us as a newborn, as the child of an adolescent teenager who will cry in the night and spit up half of supper, be unable to speak or sing or utter an opinion or express a feeling, and be utterly helpless to get a morsel to eat without the assistance and cooperation of someone else ~ because of love ~ boggles my mind and stirs me to the very depths of my soul.

God tried laws. God tried miracles. God tried famines and plagues and pestilence. God said you don't want to do that, and the people said watch us. God said that fruit isn't good for you, and they said, we need to check that out for ourselves. God sent prophets and poets and pastors and teachers, and the people just kept on doing their own thing, checking in with God when it felt good, going their own way when they thought they knew best. So when the way got really dark and hard and desperate, and God couldn't stand by for another moment watching the human race flail and flounder, God said, everybody's a sucker for a baby. I'm going to join them and walk with them, and lead them by my example, and show them that I need them. I'm going to live the life I want them to live, and love in the way I want them to love. Maybe if I go myself instead of sending someone else, they'll hear me and see me, and follow me.

That's the primary miracle I celebrate this night, and the second is just about as incredible: the people that God went to first for assistance said yes. God went to Mary, and said you and I are going to have a baby together - and Mary said, I am your servant, let it be with me according to your word. I trust you; take it from here. An angel went to Joseph, and said God and Mary are going to have a baby together, and she still wants to be your wife, and she needs you now more

than ever. And Joseph said, I can be a stepfather and a husband, if you'll show me how. The angels went to shepherds working in the fields, and told them about a birth that was for them, and invited them to come and see and join the celebration. And the shepherds, who had never been wanted by anyone or invited to anything other than more work, dropped what they were doing, followed a star and went to find the newborn baby.

An adolescent, a tradesman and migrant workers all believed that the Creator of the Universe would use them as partners in the drama of the incarnation. They set aside their plans and presuppositions, they made room in their lives and their hearts for an unheard of, unprecedented miracle. And through them, a child was born, a light shone forth, Love was brought to birth, and Peace was heralded across the mountaintops.

And to us. Whether we're adolescents or tradesmen or migrant workers. Whether we're homemakers or computer technicians, retirees or college students, teachers or nurses or mail carriers, God still comes to us - and wants to use us as partners in the drama of the incarnation. Will we be as open to the impossible as Mary? Will we be as attentive to the flutter of angel wings as Joseph? Will we stand in the light of God's love with the shepherds - and then go and see this bold new thing that God is doing among us, and then go and tell of the love and the peace and the joy that God wills for us and our world?

Will we?