

Advent Devotions 2022

Christmas Eve



Swaddling is great for babies. Wrapping them securely helps recreate the conditions of the womb, making them feel safe and containing their startle reflex. Photos of well-swaddled babies on social media lead to appreciative, knowing comments from people who have also wrapped infants into tight little burritos of calm.

My wife and I had our third child in August, and from the very beginning she seemed to resist being swaddled. Even as a newborn in the hospital she seemed to constantly try to wiggle free. And yet when she relaxed for just a moment, she seemed to settle down and realize that the bands of cloth brought comfort and some level of relaxation. Swaddling can be done with just a blanket, or if you are like me, you rely on a swaddle sack to achieve this level of comfort for your child. Studies show that this ancient practice helps babies sleep, reduces the chances of SIDS, and of course helps parents sleep as well.

Jesus was swaddled just like my kids were swaddled, just like I was swaddled, perhaps just like you were swaddled. And so this Christmas I wonder of what significance that might be? What does swaddling mean for us in our imperfect world? What does swaddling mean when we try so hard yet struggle to keep everything together? What does swaddling mean when we are so busy? What does swaddling mean when life is going great and not so great?

Here's the thing about the Christmas story. Despite this loving act by Mary, safety is not promised. Safety is not part of the Christmas story because it is not part of our story. I can only guess that as Mary wrapped her child in bands of cloth she wondered, "Is it tight enough?" "Is it too tight?" Then she proceeded to lay him in the manger. Such thoughts crossed my mind too as I wrestled Quinn into her sleep sack for the first time. "Is this how you do it? Is she comfortable? Is this really safe? Where's the nurse; he is better at this than me."

As picturesque as we likely have this birth scene in our imagination, I can only imagine it was anything but quiet, peaceful, and safe. Traveling so late in a pregnancy is not a good idea. Mary was young. The process of giving birth is painful. This story is anything but safe. But when you think about it, neither are our lives.

Our lives and the Christmas story are a bit messy, aren't they? But that is the very world into which Jesus was born. That is the very world into which God came to us, and still comes today, because that is the world we live in. That is the message of Christmas! God comes to us in all our peculiarities and quirks. God comes to us in all of our complications and stressors God comes to us in all of our ... everything!

The message of Christmas is not that God insulates us from the imperfections of life, but rather that God comes into the very messiness of life, God is with us, giving us strength and understanding and wisdom to live in this world. And it all begins in a manger in the small town of Bethlehem. In that act of coming to us, God swaddles us with divine love.

Merry Christmas to you and your family!