

Manger Danger!

"And it came to pass in those days...that she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger" (v. 7).

~ We love the manger scene... as we gather on Christmas Eve.

...But if you think about it, a stable is not precisely the place you'd *want*.. to have a baby. ...And not the kind of crib you'd choose. ..We would much prefer the hospital to a cave (which it probably was). We'd rather hear the steady voice of a doctor ...or labor nurse.... than a cacophony of cows mooing, sheep baaing.... and goats grunting. We'd prefer a climate-controlled room with a sanitized bassinet ...more than a cattle trough...likely made of stone, chiseled into the floor and filled with hay.

Having babies has always been risky business. And the places where people have laid babies after birth have been a bit dodgy. For example, the crib as we know it, was not invented until the 1800s. Before then, infants generally slept with their mothers, which we now know can be dangerous. But, even cribs have a dangerous history: drop sides, slatted walls, and lead paint.

One of the more bizarre baby conveyances came in the early 1900s - when experts thought fresh air was vital to a child's development. But if you lived in a city - getting out of a high-rise was a problem. So, a woman named Emma Reed applied to patent a "*baby cage*" -- attached (get this), outside... to an open window....where a baby could catch some fresh air ...while suspended several stories above the street.

Raising children is still risky.

~ ***But  was even riskier in the first century.***

Mary put Jesus in a manger - - because she had no choice. The Inn was full. The barn to the rear of the inn was the only place with privacy. And Mary herself was at high risk in giving birth.

It was a dangerous birth, *much more than we can imagine*.. given our proclivity to postcard images of the nativity.

But if the manger itself... was ***dangerous***, ...the babe, meek and mild... wrapped in swaddling cloths lying within it ***was even more so!***

It's hard to think of a baby as dangerous -- a toddler, maybe, but not a newborn.

And yet, just eight days after his birth, the old man Simeon would declare at his dedication in the temple... that *this child* was... "destined for the falling and rising of many... in *Israel*." So dangerous... Simeon said to Mary, his mother, "a sword will pierce your own soul, too" (2:34-35).

! Those are ominous words... about a baby.

!! Then again...what *child* is this!??

Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virginal, Mary. As the angel announced....*this child* "will be holy. Called - - the **Son of God**" (1:35). John's names him... "*the Word*" of God made flesh... who dwelt... among us (John 1:14). ***This baby is God... become human.*** Now in flesh appearing...

Talk about dangerous!

For, if Jesus is fully divine, ~ fully God, then all other definitions of God....fall short. ~ ~ ~

Because...(first point) we like to think of God as being, **God** -- and nothing else! Certainly not human.

And, second, if Jesus is fully human, then all other definitions of true *humanity* also fall short. Because it's painful...to see how much better we could be!

This a problem... in a world which, from the beginning, people have tended to manufacture their own gods. And where people have tended to see being human as a limited and faulty being. We like our gods to be "spiritual". We consign them to a *distant* heaven - where we can keep them at arm's length and not have them interfere too much with us.

Andwe hold up our *humanity* as a default excuse.. for our brokenness.

After all we're.... "only human."

In Jesus though, we learn that God is not unknowable. Not distant... nor unconcerned with human affairs!

We learn that the God who made heavens and earth is *intimately involved* in Creation... to the point of coming to walk among people - in Person.

A God who becomes human.. **is a God who must be reckoned with.** That makes this baby dangerous - to the way the world normally works.

We cannot consign him to heaven... because He.. has come to earth.

We cannot push him aside as a figment of our imagination, because God has come... with a human face.

Here's a God who has entered fully into the human-mess - *mess*: living in poverty, living as a refugee, ... walking with those who have major issues. When he lived among us, he associated with outcasts. He gave help to the poor, the sick and the broken. He cared about immigrants and strangers. He *didn't* care much.... about money, or sex, or power.

Here is a God who calls us to follow. Not to just kneel and obey but...to be like him: to be like Jesus.. of Nazareth. And here is a God who has come not only to *live*.... but to die for the people he created.

The people of Jesus' day couldn't wrap their heads around this sort of God: One who was human and who deigned come down off Olympus... and live as a mortal.~ The world continues to struggle with this concept. Better to have a God we can control and keep *out* of the public square... than one who enters our mess and gets personal.

And now...we know how.

Because Genesis' first commandment...to these humans God made, is to take care of Creation. He shows us *how*.. to get out of this mess.

If we live fully....God's image *in us*, we become the people God created us to be. Full of purpose - and *abundant* life!

Jesus, born of Mary, grown among us as one of us.... shows us what that true Life is like. He reveals what it is to be fully human and, at the same time, ... one.. with the Divine.

But Jesus does more than just *model* full divinity and humanity.... In his resurrection, he gives us the *Power*... to live it now and Eternally.

This.. manger-laid child ...*was* one day.. dangled ..above a city street -- not in a cage.. but on a cross.

And because of the cross, we are *one with God*...

Now...and forever.,

This is the life he was born to bring us.

This is *both*: the danger *and* power....presented by the manger.

A danger - - because it challenges us....

To be *more* fully human...

To be more like God...

Hallelujah. Amen.