

I thought that having to walk, 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, while 9 months pregnant, was going to be the death of me.

I thought that was the hardest thing I'd ever have to do.

But I was wrong.

Then, upon arriving in Bethlehem, with no place to stay, while going into labor, I thought that giving birth on the side of the dirt road was going to be the death of me.

Thankfully, it wasn't because I didn't have to.

Joseph found a place for us to stay.

It was a barn, but at least it was safe and warm.

Then I thought Jesus' birth, 12 long hours of labor, was going to do me in.

I thought that was the hardest thing I'd ever have to do.

But it wasn't.

I didn't know it at the time, but the hardest part of my life came years later, when Jesus was an adult, 33 years old to be exact.

But that night, that he was born, after all those things that I thought might do me in, turned out to be the best night of my life.

He was perfect.

He had all 10 fingers and 10 toes.

A beautiful head of hair.

Healthy lungs and a beautiful, piercing, cry.

Thankfully the animals didn't mind.

Looking back, I should have been terrified because I had no idea what I was doing.

I didn't know where we were going to live.

I didn't know how to be a mom or what to do, we didn't have books and mom blogs back then.

I am sure I was a little scared, but I remember feeling more elated than anything.

It was still a mystery how, and why, this all happened.

But I didn't care.

I was euphoric.

My body gave birth to this perfect baby.

All wasn't well with the world, I assure you, but all was well in the stable that night.

So, whether you've had children or not,

most of us have had the opportunity to interact with, hold, and play with babies at least some point in our lives.

This is my own opinion, but I think babies are the most perfect form of human.

Nobody can argue with the goodness of a baby.

If a baby is sick, nobody questions its lifestyle choices and why it got sick.

If a baby is homeless, nobody says that it should've been more responsible.

If a baby is crying, nobody blames it for having strong emotions.

Babies don't do offensive or malicious things.

Babies are blameless.

So, of course God chose to come to earth in the form of a baby because they're the human embodiment of perfection.

The problem is that when we grow up, something happens, and we move away from that idyllic state.

We get mean and cynical and grouchy and vengeful.

This is why we need Christmas and Easter, because they both have the same message at their core, which helps to bring us back to that innocent, child-like state.

The ultimate meaning of this whole birth story, that I probably tell you every year because we need the annual reminder, is that love always wins.

The true meaning of Christmas, when you strip away all the sentimental trappings that we've decorated the holiday with, that love, kindness and compassion have the final word.

The light, no matter how tiny the glimmer, even in vast desolation, will always, eventually, outshine the darkness.

Hope must spring eternal, because any other option, isn't an option if we want to survive.

We know that this perfect place where love is the law of the land, right now, only exists in heaven.

And our biblical faith is heaven-rooted.

Our faith tells us that when we pass on, we will go to a beautiful, utopian place where we'll be reunited with loved ones and all will be harmonious.

But our faith can't *only* be heaven-focused, it also has to be grounded in the here-and-now, the messiness of this world.

After all God came to Earth.

If God wanted all of us in heaven, something apocalyptic would've happened by now and that's where we'd all be, with God.

But that's not what happened and that's not where we are.

God came to us, embodied in this messy human experience.

This is where God wants to rule.

God is not content to have quiet harmony in heaven but will have God's own way with people and with nations, right here.

God will not quit until a particular governance is wrought on earth, a rule of justice and righteousness, a rule of humaneness, equity, dignity, respect, and well-being for all people.

God wants God's will done on earth as it is in heaven.

So, how does this happen?

How does the idyllic peace of heaven come to exist on earth?

Through that perfect, vulnerable baby in a manger.

Through the one who embodied both the power of God and the knowledge of how to live according to God's will here on earth,

in these mortal bodies that we occupy for a period of time.

I know that things in our world seem really bleak right now.

The peace and sense of security that we took for granted for so long feels threatened.

When I was writing this sermon, I actually had to stop myself from reading the news during my writing breaks because I was worried that I might lose the sense of hope that I had conjured up to put on paper and relay to all of you.

I know that we are stressed and anxious and it seems like there's no end in sight to the massive changes that are underway in our nation and our world.

But believe it or not, things were worse when Jesus was born.

And depending on your age, you may have experienced worse times than this in your own lifetime.

But for those who feel like everything as we know it is under threat, the only thing that will save us is the conviction that love really does have the last word.

I know it might seem irrational and impractical, but so was Jesus being born in a stable, as a vulnerable baby, to refugee parents.

Nevertheless, this birth brought tyrants from their thrones.

He challenged the Roman Empire, one of the most powerful empires to ever exist on earth.

So, yes, times are weird, and the future might seem dim, but we've been brought back from the brink before, and we'll be brought back again.

Because even if it takes a while, even if we have to descend into deep darkness first, even if we have to go to the Cross, the honest-to-God, unalienable truth is that right always wins.

In the end.

The light shines through even the tiniest of cracks.

It's our job to be cultivators of the light, bearers, beacons.

It's our job to embody the perfect love of that baby, born in a manger.

Things on earth definitely aren't as they are in heaven.

Jesus came to show us how to bridge the gap.

Two thousand years later, we still have a lot of work to do.

Sometimes it feels like that gap is an accordion that gets bigger and smaller.

Sometimes we get closer to God's will for us, then we move further away, back and forth.

But we are called to persistently try to live out Christ's perfect love, however, and whenever we can.

Because God knows our world needs it.

That's why God sent us Jesus.

That's why we celebrate his world-changing birth, because we so desperately need him, and the world desperately needs each of us.

May you have faith enough to believe that love always wins, and may you have the courage to live your life accordingly.

Amen and merry Christmas.