

Christmas Homily 2008 • Christ the King

Think about it. You are God. For centuries humans, your beloved, have been crying out to you: in prayer, anger, praise, suffering and thanksgiving. They have been longing, groaning and sighing for you to rid the world of injustice, pain, loneliness and heartbreak.

And as God, you answer. You desire for them to know you more intimately. You desire a relationship, a relationship of love. So you decide to come to be with them. How would you come?

Would you come as a superhero, with bulging muscles, speed, charisma and unstoppable force? Would you come and out-muscle, out-gun and overwhelm everyone who opposed you? Would you come and bang heads together so as to rid the planet of falsehood and evil? How would you come?

How does God come?

Today a savior has been born for us, who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

God's answer doesn't exactly meet the world's expectations or maybe even our own, it surpasses them. For what was born with Jesus' birth and what lies seemingly helpless in the manger wasn't what was expected. The world expected a superstar with talent, beauty, and raw-muscle power. What we get is a baby lying helpless in a manger.

Why? Why would God choose to be born into the world as a baby?

Because a baby is powerless. You can't argue with a baby. Babies don't try to compete, babies don't stand up to you, babies don't try to impress you with all the answers. Indeed, babies can't speak at all. You have to coax everything out of them — a smile, a word, a giggle. It takes effort, demands patience, but it also draws the best out of you.

And that is our Savior who was born in Bethlehem. That is also how God is still basically in the world. **Like a baby, God does not outgun anyone, God doesn't out-muscle anyone, God doesn't threaten anyone, God doesn't overpower anyone. The power of God revealed in Christmas is the power of a baby, nothing more, nothing less: innocence, gentleness, helplessness, a vulnerability that softens the heart, invites all in, and calls forth what's best in each of us.**

The power of Christmas is like the power of a baby, it underwhelms in such a way that it eventually overwhelms. **There is a greater power than muscle, speed, charisma, and unstoppable force.** Such is the power of love, the way of God. Such is the message of Christmas.

Sometimes we miss this point; we want our messiahs to possess more immediate power. And we are in good company here. The messiah that people longed for during all those centuries leading up to Jesus and Bethlehem was a human superhero, someone with the earthly muscle to bang heads together and purge the world of evil.

Sometimes we are slow to understand. We want and expect a messiah who comes in our earthly terms, all charisma, muscle and good looks, banging heads together so as to rid the planet of falsehood and evil. We want the kind of messiah we see at the end of every Hollywood thriller defeating the bad guys.

But that's not the Christmas story, nor the God revealed in it. An infant lying in the manger in Bethlehem didn't outgun anyone or out muscle anyone. No, God is born helpless, vulnerable. He just lay there, waiting for anyone, good or bad, to come to him, to see his helplessness, to feel a tug at his or her heart, and then gently try to coax a smile or a word out of him. That's still how God meets us. That is the power Christmas, the power of love.

Adapted from The God Who Is Revealed in Christmas, by Ron Rolheiser. © 2008-12-14.