

Our One-Day-Old Birthday  
Luke 2:22-40  
Dec. 26, 2021  
Kory Wilcoxson

One day old. That's how old Jesus would be today. Stop and think about that a second. One day old. We're so used to talking about age in years that it takes a minute for "one day old" to sink in. When is the last time you were around someone whose life on earth could be measured in hours?

That's what I remember thinking when my daughter Sydney was born. Holding that pudgy little body in my hands, I thought, "This girl hasn't even been in the world for a whole day yet." That baby that was just kicking me through her mommy's belly is now cradled in my arms, completely dependent upon us for absolutely everything she needed to survive.

And then the realization hit me: the only thing more helpless than a one-day-old is a one-day-old's parents! From what little I can remember about that time, we were both exhausted. After an extremely difficult labor all we wanted to do was sleep. Our joy at this new birth was mixed with fatigue and doused with a heavy helping of anxiety. We had no idea what to do with this round ball of flesh and bones that now belonged to us.

Sure, we'd read books and taken classes and talked to other parents. But that's all fine because it's still theoretical. It's a whole new ballgame when the baby arrives. We went from being a couple one day to parents the next. And we didn't have a good track record. By the time Sydney came along, we had already killed three fish. If she knew her odds, she may have hopped the first stroller out of town. I can remember thinking more than once as I looked at her in her hospital bed, "God, why do you trust us to care for this child? What do we know?"

We learned, for the most part, through trial and error. For instance, although diaper cream and toothpaste come in similar containers, they taste very different. It's amazing how forgiving infants can be. I think God gave them little brains so that they wouldn't remember all the ways their parents inadvertently torture them. I remember talking with our pediatrician about the kind of irrational fears first-time parents are plagued with. Every cough is life-threatening, every cry means something is horribly wrong. After dumping our anxiety on the doctor for a few minutes, she just patted our hands and said, "Guys, it's OK. Babies bounce." I don't think she was giving us permission to drop Sydney, but she was saying that there is a lot of grace in being a first-time parent.

Eventually, we got better at it. One day turned into two, then into a week, then a month, and somehow Sydney has survived 23 years. I had the same feeling with Molly as I did with Sydney when she was born. I wanted the whole world to stop and look at our beautiful, perfect baby. But it didn't. The visitors trailed off, the food and flowers faded, we went home, the world kept spinning. But our lives, all four of them, would never, ever be the same.

When you think about it, that's not much different than the implications of Jesus' birth. We wait with anticipation for his birth, we mark the time with worship and carols and candlelight and nativity scenes. The birth takes place amidst much fanfare and celebration, but then a day or two after, the decorations come down, the visitors go home,

the tree is discarded or put away, the holiday cheer put back in storage, December turns to January, the world keeps spinning. Christmas is over.

So take a deep breath and let out a big sigh. We survived another Christmas! We survived the holiday rush and the standing in line and the traffic and the visits to Santa and the decorating and the cooking and the family visits, and hopefully we'll survive the credit card bills. It's a joyous time, but there's always a bit of relief in our voice when we can look at Christmas in our rearview mirror. Christmas has been turned into a one-time event in the year, to be approached, viewed, and passed, like a road sign on a highway. Even though, technically, the 12 days of Christmas have just started, on this side of Dec. 25, we speak of it in the past tense. The event we know as Christmas is over.

Does that mean that the promises of God have been fulfilled? We hope so, because we've been waiting. Maybe we've been waiting several weeks, or nine months, or our whole lives. Maybe we've been waiting for comfort after the death of a loved one. Or maybe we've been waiting for companionship to take away our loneliness. Or maybe we've been waiting for a promise to be fulfilled, or for comfort for a promise unfulfilled. Or maybe we've been waiting for a sense of purpose for our lives. But we've all been waiting for something, haven't we? Maybe today, the day after the birth of our Savior, maybe now our wait is over, maybe the miraculous past event that we remembered yesterday is still going on for us, in us.

I think the question of tense is crucial to the place of Christmas in our lives. To see this holy day as an event to be observed is to miss the greatest present we receive at Christmas. Because I believe for our faith to be a living faith, a lively faith, Christ's birth must be a present happening. Christmas is not paying homage to a framed birth announcement hanging on the wall. It's not something we pack and put into storage. Christ is not 2000 years and one day old today, but only one day old, once again. And he brings with him the same newness and innocence and purity and hope and promise that he brought in Bethlehem. If Christmas is just an event to be remembered, then those gifts mean nothing to us. But if we believe Christ is born again, then we can claim the hope he brings as our own.

Simeon knew about this new start. Luke tells us that Simeon had waited his whole life for the Messiah, and when he finally meets him, he sings a glorious song of praise, as he prepared for his new life. Anna was no different. Even at 84 years old, Anna's life was changed by the coming of Jesus, and she began telling everyone about this miraculous event.

Christmas is a rebirth, not only of Jesus, but of us, of our faith. It's a renewal of the grandest kind, the kind of event that can take even the strongest, most skeptical, weary faith and surprise it. For example, do you remember last Christmas Eve? Do you remember worshipping in the sanctuary and holding up your candle during "Silent Night?" Well, you don't, because we didn't worship in the sanctuary last Christmas Eve. Thanks, Covid.

That made this Christmas Eve even more powerful. We ministers can become a bit calloused to yearly celebrations. In the flickering lights of all the candles, in the soul-stirring music, in the familiar words of the Christmas story, I felt a newness to my faith. Listen to these lyrics from "Welcome to our World," the Chris Rice song sung so beautifully on Christmas Eve by Katherine Steckler. "Tears are falling, hearts are breaking, how we need to hear from God. You've been promised, we've been waiting.

Welcome Holy Child.” Christmas Eve was a reminder of God’s answered promise. Just being back in the sanctuary on Christmas Eve was like a rebirth and a reminder that Christmas is a present tense celebration.

It’s like being a new parent all over again. We have this thing now, this brand new, kicking, crying, hungry thing, a thing called faith. And we have to figure out how to feed it, and care for it, and soothe it. We have to find ways to help it grow, and to heal it when it gets hurt, and to celebrate when it shines and point it down the right path. One thing I do know: With this birth of faith, we will never, ever be the same. If you’ve been looking for a reason to recommit to your faith, today is the day.

Isn’t it exciting? I mean here is our faith, only one day old. We have the rest of time stretched out before us like an endless possibility. We may ask, “God, why do you trust us to have faith in you? Look at our track record!” Yet once again, God has sent his only son to us, so that we may fully know God’s love and mercy for us, and so that we may be adopted as God’s children and heirs to the kingdom. God knows our track record, and yet we still are blessed with a new start, with one-day-old faith, on this day after Christmas.

So as you put away the decorations and the wrapping paper, don’t put your Christmas spirit into storage with them. Remember the joy of this season, carry it in your heart, take it out and put it on display for everyone to see. Christmas may be over in our homes, but it’s only over in our hearts if we let it be. “You’ve been promised, we’ve been waiting. Welcome Holy Child.” From this day forward, live your life as if every day is a Christmas gift from God. There’s a saying that goes, “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” Yes it is. Thanks be to God.