

Is this how you think of God – sitting in the divine control room high above the playing field of this world – a camera focused just on you – very special camera able to record not only actions and words but even thoughts and emotions, things known only to you and to God? And a camera like that for me and for every other person – billions of cameras sending all the information to God. And God sitting in that control room high above the playing field of life looking at those billions of monitors every second, evaluating every player based not only on what they do but where they started and what they think and feel. God, creating all the special effects so that every story comes out just the way God wants it to. Rain for this one, sunshine for that one, a cure here, an accident here, an army crushed over there, a child miraculously saved from drowning. God above it all, planning and directing and even adjusting to the strengths and weaknesses and sins and faithfulness of our living – God acting so that in the end the story comes out just the way God wants it to. Is that how you think of God?

Or is this – a young woman, Mary, startled by an angel – a messenger from God who tells her that God will enter the creation through her. A child will be born, Son of Mary yet also Son of God. Though she has not yet been with a man life will grow in her, the angel tells her, and so it happens. A child is conceived – Mary is pregnant.

Far away in Rome an emperor calls for a count of every person. So Mary travels with the man to whom she is engaged, Joseph, to the town of his ancestry and so it is that Mary's child comes to be born in the city of King David's birth. When they arrive, there is no place for them – no family or friends to open their home, no room in the inn – shelter in a stable is all they can find. There among the creatures Mary gives birth to the Lord through whom all things were created. Is this story of Mary's child how you think about God?

Is God really a God that entrusts God's Son to human hands – Joseph's callused hands welcoming God's Son in the world - Joseph's hands, cutting the cord, placing this fragile life in the arms of Mary? Is God really a God who lets God's Son become subject to the common cold, and skinned knees, shivering cold and sweltering heat? Will God come to know hunger and thirst – not as one who sees it on the monitor but one who lives them, feels them? The story

we are gathered to celebrate this night says that it is exactly like that. God has become human with you and with me in Jesus – no longer aloof, up in the booth but down on the field with us, with you. .

You know the difference between watching a video of soldiers on patrol and being in that Humvee – your life on the line.

You know the difference between seeing a movie about a family confused in its loving, and being in that family - being struck by angry words or cold silence.

You know the difference between visiting a friend in the cancer ward and being the one in the bed with the chemo flowing into your veins.

Through Jesus God knows that difference also. This child of Mary will know what it is to hug and to be hugged, to speak words in anger and to be struck not only by words but whips and slaps and nails.

This child of Mary will learn what it is like to respond to a request for help and to find that it is draining to love, costly, exhausting to give when those who need to receive know no end of their need. He will flee to a place where he can rest and be alone in prayer and the crowds will pursue him, wanting more and more and more.

This child of Mary will come to know what it is like to speak a word and have the hearers leave everything to follow.

But also this child of Mary will come to know what it is like to have people think he is crazy – to have the people who love him dearly want to protect him and take him home rather than believing in him.

Through it all what will make this child of Mary most special of all will be his trust in his Father in heaven and his love for each and every one. One day that love and that faith will lead him to Jerusalem and to a cross and to losing life itself. On the third day the Almighty God will save him by raising him from death and save you and me and all who are his through him.

But for now we see him a little baby in his mother's arms. Like mothers all around the world this day she will be praying, "God, please keep him safe." For a while he will be.

You will be too, safe for a while. And when death comes or sorrow or pain or loss you will be safe even then for you belong to this child of Mary, this Son of God, and you shall belong to him forever.