

“That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.” Do you remember the Charlie Brown Christmas TV special? My mom had us watch it, the first time it aired. It has become a tradition, for many of us.

When the little boy Linus says that, what Christmas is all about, it is the final part of his answer to Charlie Brown’s question; the first part is the shepherd and angel part of the Scripture from Luke, which we read earlier.

Lots of us are very familiar with all of this, the Scripture lesson itself, and the TV show. However, there are always new things to discover in this story. What I learned this week was very interesting.

I had known that the one who wrote this book of the Bible, Luke, was a doctor. In many of the episodes in Jesus’ life, Luke named specific things which a doctor would notice—like which hand was hurt, or what the physical condition was. That’s kind of interesting, to me, anyway.

However, the computer article I read gave another one of these, which I had never noticed before. It was about newborn babies.

Now I have been around newborn babies. You would think I would have noticed this. Maybe you have. Or maybe the art and paintings and carols we loved so much have deluded you, too.

Here it is: Baby Jesus was awake. Stay with me, this is more interesting than you might think.

“. . .Perhaps most of us tend to hear it chronologically, as if Mary had given birth and then after that the angels appeared to the shepherds and some time later they arrive to see Mary and Joseph and the baby. There are indications in the narrative, however, that these actions were more or less simultaneous. In other words, the appearance to the shepherds may have occurred at the same time as the child was being delivered, and he would have been wrapped and then placed in the manger not long at all before the shepherds arrived. If that is Luke’s narrative intent, it is also likely that he, a physician, intends us to understand that the infant lying in the manger was not asleep, but alert and wakeful, as newborns generally are for at least the first hour or so after their birth.

The medical purpose of this initial alertness appears to be bonding with the people immediately around the newborn. . . .That shepherd would appear within this time frame foreshadows the degree to which Jesus, from infancy forward in Luke’s gospel, was bonded with the concerns of people considered outcast and unclean. That angels announced this dramatically to shepherds in a way that got them there in time (they went there having made haste, Luke 2: 16) may be a further signal that God intended this kind of bonding to occur.

. . .Even the story in Luke . . .seems to take pains to imply a wakeful Jesus ready and able to bond with all who would come near, not a cute sleeping baby. When they saw Jesus wrapped and alert, they weren’t saying “Aw! How cute!” They were saying, “Oh my! How amazing!” (United Methodist Worship Page)

I find that inspiring—really inspiring! From his birth on, Jesus related to and bonded to other human beings.

And, to be sure, in his newborn state, it was as a newborn does. Later he did this as a child, then an adolescent, then a man.

Babies do bond. When only a few minutes old, my daughter locked eyes with her father.

But this baby, the baby Jesus, went on from this newborn bonding, to change the world.

For Jesus was God's Son, sent to do exactly that. He was God's love, in the flesh. As a man, Jesus taught and preached and lived out God's love. He did this as a human being, to show us that yes, we too can live out God's love.

Jesus was the living example of: "Love God with all you've got, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Now, I know there are a lot of anti-religion people who disagree, and say that religious differences just cause wars and make trouble.

But that is not exactly true. The so-called religious wars and the Crusades and the grievous errors made in the name of Christianity were perpetrated by people who had the outside shell of the faith, but not the hearts and souls of Christians. They only had a teaspoon of Christianity, when they really needed to be bathed in the Christian faith.

Well, Christmas is a good time to do exactly that. Bathe in the Christian faith, soak in it, let Jesus Christ and all that he means, soak into your heart and soul. Bond with him.

I'd like to close with a reflection from F. Richard Garland.

"On this night of nights the Promised One appears, full of grace and truth. For those who trust the power of God, a new way of living is made possible. Isaiah foretells it. Luke tells what

happened. We are offered an opportunity to join the celebration.

. . . to join ourselves to the zeal of the Lord of hosts

. . . to go with the shepherds to the place where Love is born

. . . .to join the heralds of redemption in praise of God for this holy birth.

On Christmas Eve we are offered a sacred treasure.

. .Let us come to the Light of lights.

. . .Let us be upheld in hope, peace, joy, and love.

. . .Let us bow before the manger.

. . . .Let us prepare to become good news in a weary world.

May Christ be born in us this night, and forevermore."

Amen.

By Rev. Sally J. DeMasters