

What a shout and a song must have gone up that night, as the angels of God sang to the shepherds! What we sing routinely at Christmas season, they literally sang to the rooftops and to the heavens above! They knew something worth telling! Yet God had assigned them to the starry skies and to the lonely hillsides where the lowliest folk of the village of Bethlehem performed a lowly task.

Oh, theirs was not a job for weaklings, but for men of the outdoors. Men and boys who sleep out at nights on campouts, hiking trails, and hunting trips know the rigors and their requirements. No haircurlers and make-up allowed. No conveniences of home. This is the domain of the wanderers', the late night stories, the place of dreams, the place where all one's reflexes and strengths are put to the test! Wolves. Darkness. Storms. Loneliness! These will test a soul who dares to keep the flocks. It is done day and night and for the 6 months of the wintry season wherever these night warriors can find good grasses and lead the sheep where the necessity of grazing can meet the safety of watchful shepherds. Oh, it is not for sissies!

Here the angels of God are sent to tell this rugged bunch, who will undoubtedly have seen it all before under the midnight skies. Here they sang of the glories of God! The plan of the ages! The beginning of the great project of redemption, the one foretold by prophets through the ages! Here the message was delivered in grand style on a grand scale!..... "A Baby has been born to us, God's own SON! ...a Redeemer who will take away the curse begun in the bowers of the first garden. He will begin as a child but grow into a man, the Son of Man, who will rule over all

*heaven and earth for all generations, forever and ever! Glory Be to the God of the Highest Heaven! He has heard our cry and begun the great plan of salvation of us all! **Glory Be to God!***" It was a song to be sung throughout all creation, and to be sung in Tryon, North Carolina today! He will become GREAT! To the Glory of our LIFE-GIVING CREATOR!

II. THE WONDER OF A BABY!

A. We have all seen this little bundle of joy today, Charley, born to Cindy and Trey! We have all seen the wonder of her perfectly smooth skin, those rosy cheeks, the ripples of this baby's tiny hands and feet, her wisps of light hair, watched her smile, sleep and rest in her momma's arms. What a wonder!

The greater wonder for those who will look long enough and deeper beyond what meets the eye is the wonder of what she will become! Those tiny hands will hold the tools of life, the books of knowledge, the hands of others. They will grasp the doorknobs of a hundred doors that swing open into worlds of opportunity. She will become a woman, a citizen of a community, a servant of God! What she is today is wonderful. What she will become tomorrow will be a wonder!

B. I love to look into a baby's face and remember that it means "*God has not given up on us yet!*" There will be one more child to carry on. As we face the loss of special people from our congregation this week, I need that ongoing promise of God. There are replacements coming every moment, right here before us. Every child is God's answer to how we will carry on in the face of our continuing losses.

Someone will take up where George Scofield left off; he took his specialized hobby and recorded our history through flags, then he gave it to the town! Someone will become a person of quiet

wisdom, strength and commitments of service, like Ellis Fincher, Sr. He gave all that he had accumulated to others because he believed in servanthood. Someone will take up where Ken Batchler left off. He grew in love in his heart until he had enough to inspire us all with simple determination and a new found love for God. He met death without fear and without one single fear of tomorrow. *"I love all of you!"* he said. *"And thanks for loving me!"* he cried as he breathed his last! Someone will take over where he left off!

Someone will work like Tommy Radford did, with young people, and an unshakeable purpose of making their lives full of fun, discipline, keeping them in gales of laughter all the while. Someone will love the game of life as Tommy Radford did and will take up where his all too short life left off! God keeps on entrusting us with life, and these babies will become something special to each succeeding generation. God has not given up on us yet!

You know what is said about kittens.... *"The trouble with kittens is that they become CATS!"* The wonder of babies is that they become real people, full of hopes and dreams, and some of them will find the power and encouragement to go on with their dreams and give great gifts to humankind.

III. Babies are an important part of Christmas celebrations....

A. Because God sent our Redeemer as a helpless baby. God has said to us that all of the most important experiences and truths of our world must start out in infancy and grow into maturity. God let our hope of salvation begin with the *"Infant HOLY, Infant LOWLY, for His bed a cattle stall."* What Jesus was to become was subject to all the joys AND trials of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. He tasted it all, and was tempted in it all, as we are. Yet **he became** what God intended, our Savior.

The Wonder of God's baby is more than this virgin birth and amazing nativity, more than the song of the angels of God could tell. The Glory of God WAS the **Incarnation**, God's Living Word coming to earth all dressed up in human flesh, glorious as that is. Yet the wonder of this baby was all that **He became**..... the Crucified one... and the Resurrected Lord. **He became** Sin, willingly, that we might become the Righteousness of God!

B. Why should we be surprised? The cries of God's baby had to become more. The Word of God already existed in the beginning, as John's gospel tells. "*He was with God and He was God.*" He participated in creation, as Colossians chapter 1 tells. Jesus became flesh, a human being. "*He became like man,*" as Paul said in Philippians 2.

Jesus became that tiny baby who was laid in a manger. He became a grown man, following the pattern of human growth. Though Jesus was sinless, he became accursed with sin not by his own sin, but willingly, because of ours. He became our Savior by taking our place with the consequences, the punishment and ultimately death. He died on the cross as our judgment and punishment was delivered, when in reality, we should have taken the blows.

Then came the glorious resurrection. Jesus completed his mission-the purpose for which he came on that first Christmas. He rose up from the grave, the firstfruits of those God intends to raise-up. Jesus overcame death that WE might become like him!

IV. There is just one conclusion we should consider, that is.....
What will we become? What HAVE we become because of Jesus? Are we people with a SOUL? One with the capacity to sense God with us, the capacity to love and trust ourselves to God? One with the capability of acting in compassion and love, especially when undeserved, like Jesus did? Are we forgiven people,

demonstrating it by our forgiveness of others? Are we those who live in the promise of forever, of Eternal Life? Have we become living messengers of God's hope and demonstrators of God's peace?

When Jesus met his first disciples, Peter and Andrew, he said to them, *"Follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men!"* The same power that made Jesus become flesh, become a person among people, become obedient to death, and become the first of the resurrection..... is now working in us, giving us the power to become children of God and fishers of men!

What will Charley become? What will you become?

END, First Draft, 1412 words.

In this busy worship, need to cut 400 words