

Jesus, the Child of Hope Luke 2:1-5

In the darkness of despair

Christmas is still three weeks away, but if you step outside, you can already feel that the Christmas season has begun. Homes are decorated with Christmas trees and lights, stores are playing carols, and before long, Christmas cards will start arriving in your mailbox. But have you ever noticed how Christmas cards lie to us? Every December, my mailbox fills up with pictures of perfect families—everyone smiling, wearing matching sweaters, not a single hair out of place. Even the dog looks straight at the camera like a professionally trained model. Everything looks peaceful. Everything looks harmonious.

But none of us actually live like that. In real life, somebody is crying, somebody is arguing, somebody is overwhelmed, and somebody is asking, “Where did I put the gift receipts?” That’s the real world. And yet the cards show perfect peace. You know what? We often do the same thing with the story of Jesus’ birth.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the season when we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. When you think about Christmas—about Jesus’ birth—what picture appears first in your mind? Maybe baby Jesus wrapped in cloth... Joseph and Mary smiling lovingly at Him... animals resting peacefully... shepherds and wise men worshipping in a calm, holy scene. A happy little family in a clean stable—that’s often the “holy family” image we carry. But did the *first* Advent really look like that? Not at all.

Our Scripture readings today show us the reality of Jesus’ world at His birth. The book of *Lamentations* describes the pain people felt after Israel was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC: “Our enemies laugh at us with open mouths... devastation and ruin! Rivers of water run from my eyes because my people are destroyed... My spirit is grieved as I see the fate of the children in my city.” It’s the prophet’s desperate prayer—a cry of people who lost their nation and now must live as a conquered people.

After Babylon, Israel lived under foreign rule for almost 600 years. Babylon fell—Persia took over. Then Greece. Then Egypt and Syria. A short moment of independence—then Roman empire conquered them again.

Luke begins today’s passage this way: “In those days, Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole Roman world.” Why does an empire conduct a census? Taxes. The empire changed, but the suffering didn’t: heavy taxation, exploitation, and oppression—not for 10 years, not for 50 years, but for over 600 years. What must their hearts have felt like? Could they see any hope at all? Into that world, our Lord came as the Child of Hope.

The Child of Hope

What struck me this week is that the Savior, the King of kings, who came to confront the mighty Roman Empire—the empire that ruled the whole world—came not as a warrior but as a baby. In Greek and Roman mythology, heroes are also born as babies, but their births are dramatic.

- Hercules killed two snakes with his bare hands as an infant.
- Apollo, at just three days old, shot and killed the serpent Python.

But Jesus—the One we confess as our Savior—was born into a poor family, to a carpenter and a young mother, with no superpowers, simply a fragile newborn. And newborns are weak.

You must feed them... change them... carry them... They cannot live without love and care. Yet the One who came to bring hope into a world ruled by an empire came as a small, dependent child. And that is deeply meaningful. Because no matter how fragile a baby is, a child is always a symbol of hope—a symbol of infinite possibility.

Today we baptize *Leandro and Livia*. Right now, they look like little ones to us, but in them lies the possibility to become anything. They could become leaders who shape the world as disciples of Christ. They might help create a kinder, more just, more beautiful world—one aligned with God's heart. All of that incredible possibility is held in these small children. In that sense, every child carries an entire universe inside them. And the Lord who holds the whole universe came to us as a baby—a tiny Child of Hope who transformed a world full of nightmares.

The Power of Hope in Our World

When we look at our world today, many things feel discouraging. War, division, violence, brokenness—we hear it every day. Sometimes we become tempted to say, “Nothing will ever change.” Sometimes life itself feels like a nightmare we cannot escape. But there is something more powerful than nightmares.

As many of you know, Juhee and I have a little dog at home. I like to sleep in, so Juhee usually takes Joy for his morning walk. But when they come back, Joy runs straight to our bedroom and jumps on me—even when I'm in a deep sleep. And what happens? No matter how deeply I'm sleeping, a small, joyful dog always wins. In that moment, any nightmare loses its power. What is real—joyful, affectionate, and alive—breaks through. And that's the thing about hope: it often arrives in small, surprising ways—through something gentle, something vulnerable, something that interrupts the darkness.

There's another small thing that's stronger than any nightmare: a baby's cry. When I meet new parents, I always ask, “Does your baby sleep well?” If they say yes, I tell them, “You have a saint!” Even if a nightmare is gripping you, the moment you hear a baby cry, you wake up and the nightmare dissolves. Parents know this very well. (Of course, waking up isn't easy on the body...)

And that is exactly how God works in our world. Even when empires dominate, even when situations worsen, even when fear feels overwhelming—God interrupts the darkness. God wakes us up. The cry of Jesus, the Child of Hope, is God's own wake-up call—a call that says, “Rise. Do not surrender to despair. Hope is here.” God is still the One who holds history. God is still working for the healing and salvation of this world.

Beloved Asbury family, The King of kings came to us as a Child of Hope. And we are the people who answer His call—people who carry a flame of hope, not despair. There is an old saying: “Better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.” We are the ones who light that small candle and shine its hope into the world. Christ came as the Child of Hope—a small flame in the darkness—and through that small flame, God changed everything. As we wait for His coming, I pray that your homes and your hearts may be filled with joy and hope. Amen.