
Where Do Babies Come From?

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (Luke 1.26-35)

Sooner or later, every child on earth wonders the same thing. Sometimes our children ask the question out loud, but sometimes they don't. After a few years of watching carefully the ways of the world, our children ask the dreaded question:

"Mommy, Daddy, where do babies come from?"

We daddies catch our breath. We perform some quick calculations; we rehearse a hasty summary of biology in our heads. We look down at our little daughter, and we say, "Great question. Go ask your mother."

If it is our son who has asked the question, we daddies don't say anything at all. We just take him hunting, take him fishing, take him outdoors; and we hope that somewhere out there he'll notice what's going on.

Where do babies come from? Where does this new and glorious child come from?

I believe that the gospel lesson for this glorious day delivers the answer for us. We have just heard words that are familiar to most of us. They are words that describe the miraculous conception of new life inside the Virgin Mary.

I know that this wonderful story from Luke is really about the birth of Jesus. But it is also the story about every new birth, and every new life.

The answer to the child's perennial question is simple, and it is miraculous. Where do babies come from?

Babies come from two people being in love. For all of us, children that we all are, it is as simple as that. Babies happen, when two people are in love!

When we children grow up, we realize something else, don't we? Being in love is not simple at all.

What does it mean for two people to fall in love?

First of all, falling in love means the excitement of the unknown. When we are in love, we are attracted to what we know, but we are also fascinated with what we do not know. Loving someone means wanting to find out all we can about that other person. It is exciting. Mary and Joseph, in these early days of their relationship, were fascinated not just with what they knew, but they were lovingly fascinated with what they did not know. They were betrothed, but not yet married.

Secondly, being in love involves fear. Some of what we do not know is actually frightening. Love can be very confusing. Love is not all skipping lightly over the hills. Love bears hardship and pain. That is why the first words of the angel to Mary (and Joseph) were "Do not fear." If we want to be in love, we learn to grow out of fear.

Thirdly, love means being disappointed. When two people are in love, we inevitably disappoint one another. Sometimes we even do it on purpose, and we must ask forgiveness. Then, love means forgiveness and letting go.

Yes, love bears hardship and pain, disappointment and even sin; but love also bears something else. Love will always bear fruit. Love bears the fruit of forgiveness and new life. Mary and Joseph fell in love, and a miracle occurred. Where do babies come from? Babies come from two people being in love.

Wait a minute! Doesn't the story say that this birth, this birth of Jesus, came about because the Holy Spirit came upon Mary? Isn't that what the miraculous birth is about? Isn't Jesus the fruit of *God* and Mary, not *Joseph* and Mary?

Yes, of course Jesus is that fruit. But the principle is the same. The birth of Jesus results from two people being in love. Those "people" are God and Humanity. The birth of Jesus results from God loving Humanity, and Humanity loving God.

It takes two. It takes two to tango. The birth of Jesus occurred because of love.

God loved the world so much that God wanted to make that love real. God wanted to be incarnate in this world. God wanted to be of substance. Just like when we buy gifts and presents at Christmas, those gifts are substantial incarnations of our love for one another. God is sending us love notes during this season. God has a love affair with the world, a love affair with you and me.

But it takes two to have a love affair. It takes faith on both sides. It takes a response from us, just like the response of Mary and Joseph

God's love affair with us, like all love affairs, has not been simple at all. It involves the excitement of the unknown. It has involved fear. The love between God and Us has borne hardship and pain, disappointment and forgiveness.

But no matter how hard it has been, no matter how confused or disappointed we might be in life, the angel's words to Mary are the same words God is sending on to you and me during this season. "Do not fear. I want to have a love affair with you. I want to be real in you. That which is conceived in you is holy."

Let it be to us according to that word. When we answer this love invitation from God, a miracle occurs. We will conceive new life. Babies will happen. And we will be born again, too.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip