

Last Sunday, we had a fantastic pageant here in church. In the morning we had a cast of 40 children taking part, but the starring role of the baby Jesus was played by Olivia. Olivia was selected for her role after her stellar performance in her baptism a few weeks earlier. On that occasion, she showed herself to be a baby very comfortable in the limelight, very happy to be the center of attention. In case someone is thinking, well, Olivia sounds like a girl, and Jesus was a boy, you are right. But there is such a thing as artistic license. That was used on this occasion. Anyway, Olivia seized her moment in the spotlight. She came into church in a mobile manger. True to form, as she was pulled down the aisle, she waved regally at the congregation. Truly, a star is born.

However, I have to say that Olivia is not the only cute baby here at St. James. In fact, all babies are cute, or at least we perceive them to be cute. Do you know that there's such a thing as the psychology of cuteness? Seeing a baby releases in us the hormone oxytocin, known as the love hormone, and it helps us to form emotional bonds. The Austrian scientist Konrad Lorenz won a Nobel Prize for his work on cuteness and how babies trigger a biological response in adults. It's this phenomenon which explains why the world over, nobody can help but speak in a rather silly, high-pitched voice to any baby they encounter, and say ridiculous things like, "Does the baby sleep all night?" Of course they don't. That's not the most ridiculous thing I ever heard anybody say. I once met a parent of twins who said that someone had come up to them and said, "Oh, are these fraternity twins?" And they said, "No, they're sisters, so I suppose that makes them sorority twins."

We all get silly and soppy when we see a baby because we recognize them as being vulnerable, and it prompts in us a protective feeling. We recognize the need to care. And the Christmas story focuses our attention on the amazing fact that God took on human flesh and was born as one of us. And just like us, he was born as a weak, vulnerable infant. The baby whose birth we

celebrate today was born into a precarious situation. Giving birth always carries with it an element of risk, especially when it's in an outhouse with ox and ass standing by rather than a doctor. It is very interesting to me that this story is included in our gospels because they could have started with Jesus formed as a fully formed adult. The fact that the story in the gospels begins with an account of his birth is vital to the Christian message. What it shows us is that when God made himself known to us and came amongst us, he didn't come to overwhelm. He came to connect with us.

That's why God became a vulnerable baby, because the only way to connect truly and deeply with one another is to become vulnerable. Real relationships mean connection, and connection means vulnerability, and vulnerability involves risk. We say that God is love because God loved each one of us enough to risk everything to be connected with us. God became vulnerable in Christ that we might know God and in turn allow ourselves to be known. Brené Brown, the great writer, has written a lot about the power of vulnerability. She writes this. "The courage to be vulnerable is not about winning or losing. It's the courage to show up when you can't predict or control the situation." What we celebrate tonight is that our God has shown up in the world, our Lord has come, and the wondrous thing is that he has come in the form of a vulnerable baby.

And let's sit with it a moment. I wonder, how does that make us feel that God has come as a vulnerable baby? What would it feel like to respond to a God who has made themselves vulnerable in that way? Can we get a sense of what it was like for the shepherds to look in the manger and gaze into the baby's face? Hallelujah, our Lord has come.