

Moderator's Christmas Message: God At Risk [video transcript]

A child at risk is what catches our eyes and hinders our hearts.

It is one of the deepest fears we have as a parent, or simply as a human being. A child at risk of harm.

In the wonderful mystery of Christmas, we can miss the reality that when God steps into the world as Jesus, everything appears in peril.

A young, unmarried, perplexed woman becomes pregnant; in Luke's gospel an angel comforts her – and us – but in Matthew's gospel, we hear the uncertainty, even fear, of her fiancé. An angel reassures him – and us – in a dream, but the shadow of social risk, accusation and blame have already fallen across the story of God.

In a small rural community, everyone knows everyone else's business, and a surprise pregnancy is not always a blessing. Consider Mary, consider Joseph, consider her parents, and consider who believes this young woman is blessed by God for this astonishing role.

A long journey, an unstable birthing room, and all the hazard of giving birth with no one but your husband in the vicinity.

Stock workers see visions of angels announcing God's triumphant entry into the world; show us a sign! A baby, wrapped, and lying in a feed trough – there is God!

The shadow and danger in Matthew's story are cast into sharp relief by a phenomenal star, which disconcerts monarchs and entices astronomers.

But the shadows do not entirely depart, as the infant Jesus' family flees into the night, and the refuge of Egypt. When dictators are threatened, people die. Even children.

And yet, God's story is made complete, decades later, with a cross and empty tomb.

In a world constrained by compliance, control and calculations of risk, we consider what God has chosen to do, wondering what odds an actuary, or bookie, would offer.

God, deciding to be born, and become, just like us.

God deciding that the most common event in human history, childbirth, would be the mark of God's engaging in our world.

Risk. Reward. God, for us, for creation.

There is wonder, beyond wonder, here. And peril, deep within. And this is the God of history, of creation, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Emmanuel, God with Us.