

A Baby Changes Everything

But to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God—John 1:12

Since Yn. Anna has been pregnant there have been lots of conversations about when he'll be born, gender and names. This goes in to pregnancy stories, the good, bad and ugly that people experienced. Then questions about where are we going to sleep, where do we put the office, how shall we decorate the room? People keep telling us, many of you included, "get ready for your entire life to change." But why, it's just a tiny little baby?

Well it turns out that when baby comes we will be celebrating more than 1 birthday and more than 1 new name will be given out. On the very day our baby is born and named, Yn. Anna will be born and named mom, and I will be born and named Dad....and this is really the reason that our lives will never be the same again. I am not being poetic here, and any of you parents already know that in a very real way you become different people when your baby is born, born along with him/her into a relationship you've never had—Mom or Dad.

Well if people are radically changed by bringing a human baby into the world...what happens when a divine baby is brought into the world? Every year during Christmas, pastors like me who are pained by how little Christ remains in Christmas, have at least one sermon to ask the question "Whose Birthday Is It?" on Christmas.

Well, the answer is obvious right- it's Jesus' birthday, even if the occasion is buried under Santa and presents. Of course it's Jesus' birthday, remember the Sunday school kids even made a cake for him one year. But the answer of "Whose Birthday Is It" isn't as obvious if you take a look at the 1st chapter of John, the Christmas account that the Armenian Church holds in high esteem, which I read from often at the end of church.

John writes: "He [Jesus, the Word] was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10-13). Did you hear that? "To all who receive him, he gave power to become children of God." "Whose birthday is it?" on Christmas. As it turns out, St. John seems to think... it's our birthday.

Oddly enough, John says nothing about baby Jesus, Mary or Joseph, and provides no details about stables, mangers and shepherds. Unlike Luke's account, the Gospel of John's account of the incarnation has inspired absolutely no lawn decorations.

But John does know something that any parent has discovered. When a child comes into the world, we celebrate more than one birthday, because Mom and Dad are reborn as parents. When the son of God is born into the world on Christmas, all of us are born again in relation to him as children of God. We became human children with the possibility of divine adoption, in this world but not of it, born once in the flesh by the will of man, reborn to the Spirit through the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

And this is the essential connection between baptism and Christmas that the Armenian Church has always held, why next Sunday we celebrate the birth of Christ, his baptism and blessing of waters. For in Holy

Baptism, we - all of us! - were born again; born not of blood, but of water; born not of the will of the flesh, but of the spirit; born not of the will of man, but of God. And so after all the celebration and gifts of Christmas, behind all the lights and wreaths, stands this one promise - that because of Christ and his Incarnation, we are reborn in relation to him as a God's own beloved child.

Yn. And I have not brought our child into the world, but everyone says be ready because things will never be the same again. I trust all of you who have kids, and will soon know what you're talking about. Now trust me. If you want a new beginning for a new year, if you want a new hope and joy in your life no matter what your age and circumstances, open your heart this Christmas season to bring the child Christ into your heart, into your world. Taste afresh and experience anew God's pledge to regard us as His own beloved children, to go with us into the new year and all that it might bring, to strengthen us in all of our living and struggling, loving and dying. If you do allow Christ to be born anew in your life, get ready, because things will never be the same again, now and always and unto the ages of ages amen.