

This is how the birth of Jesus came about . . .

With those few words a **whole story gets set in motion**. And this is a story we know very well - one we've heard probably a hundred times before. This is how the birth of Jesus came about Those few words set the stage for an incredible story, one filled with a little of everything - **faith, hope, trust, wonder** - you name it. In a certain sense, those few words are the Christian parallel of four words we've heard since we were small children, four words that we continue saying to our children to this very day . . .

Once upon a time

We know what those particular four short words signal. We know what those words "mean", know what we can expect to follow, know what we are in store for. They mean that **something wonderful is up ahead**, right around the corner. They mean that a story is about to unfold that will be filled with **drama and excitement** and interesting people and animals of all kinds and fantastical beings and princesses and kings and all that stuff. The words "Once upon a time" are **special** words - words that are often a **launching pad to some pretty wonderful things**, so much so that we can listen to the stories over and over and over again.

Once upon a time

And so there are some **similarities** between these two phrases, for they both lead us into incredible stories - stories that **seem impossible**, stories that are **unlike any other**. And so each time we hear the proclaimer of the Gospel passage begin with, "This is how the birth of Jesus came about . . .," our ears perk up a little, our attention gets a little more focused, and we settle in for a story that **still moves us and excites us and strengthens our faith**. That's just how powerful this story is.

Today, we gather on this last Sunday of Advent. Exactly seven days 'til Christmas. And we continue to **wait**. We continue to **hope**. We continue to **get ready to welcome our Savior once again** - not simply someone who came a long time ago, but someone who continues to **come to us** every moment we open our hearts and minds and souls to him. His birth might have taken place in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago, that much is true, but make no mistake about it - he's anxious to be **born again** in this time and place, **in each of us**. And so those special words don't just tell a story from long ago. They are the start of a new story, a different story, a **unique sequel to a story that still has the power to change the world** - our story - the new chapter God wants to write in the history of the world.

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So come next Sunday, Christmas Day, how will that story continue? **What's the next line**, the next paragraph, the next chapter? Or will we get a kind of "spiritual writer's block", one in which the words no longer flow, the story no longer takes shape, the **re-birth of Jesus never happens?**

Maybe it's because we struggle to believe it. And I get it. I struggle with it too. It's one thing to see God at work in the lives of the giants of faith from the past: Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist among others, and most of all, Mary - the one who **gave birth to God in the most complete way possible**. We know their stories. We know the fruits of their labors. We know the difference each of them made. And maybe we think to ourselves, "God could **never use me** like he used them, could **never count on me** as he counted on them, could **never achieve through me** anything remotely close to what he achieved through them. I just don't have it in me."

I just don't have it in me

Well, my dear friends in Christ, **our faith tells us otherwise**. Advent and Christmas tell us otherwise. The Resurrection, Ascension, and Descent of

the Holy Spirit tell us otherwise. At the heart of Christianity lies the profound belief that our God is not “out there” somewhere - distant and completely disinterested. No, we believe our God came to us and dwelt among us, and **continues to dwell in every human heart open to his grace**. We believe he was born long ago of Mary (the greatest of all disciples) - yet somehow wants to **be “re-born” in each of us**, not once, but continually. And so, we share in the profound “yes” of Mary by striving to do the same, by inviting our loving God within and then **finding ways to give birth to him in new ways**, new situations - caring for a world in desperate need of his presence, his mercy, his compassion, his love. In other words, our faith assures us that we DO **“have it in us”** - if we are open to the **One who wants to make us his home**.

Will we take up the challenge? **Will we let God in?** Will we continue the story set in motion long ago? Or will the birth of Jesus be a **thing of the past**, a distant memory?

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May those words set in motion in each of our lives a story that continues to **transform** the world, continues to fill people with **wonder**, and continues to give every person a little more **hope and peace and joy**.