

Romans 16:25-27

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him— to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Christmas miracle. Those are two words that seem to go well together. I think it's because we're so used to that word combination this time of year. You've got all those Christmas specials on TV like *Miracle on 34th Street*. And, more importantly for Christians, we celebrate all the unique miracles that make up the Christmas story. The trouble is that we've heard the Christmas story so many times that we're in danger of letting all the impressive features of the story camouflage themselves to us. Think about how many Christmas miracles there actually are. There are angels flashing around. There are, not one, but two biologically impossible children conceived – one by a barren, old woman, another by a virgin maiden. Then there are so not coincidental imperial mandates, filled inns, angel choirs, and apparently wealthy foreigners showing up on the scene. In the midst of all these mind-boggling births, powerful beings, and calculated happenings it's easy to miss another incredible miracle that was cradled not in Mary's arms, but in her heart.

Just think through Mary's story for a second. Gabriel shows up and you don't find her being troubled and afraid of his angelic presence like you do so many other believers. Instead, you find her mind processing loads of outlandish information. Gabriel tells her, "Your son will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." That's enough information to send even the most intelligent person reeling to comprehend. What does Mary do though? She, without blinking or even a second thought, accepts the information as undisputed fact. That's called faith. In fact, she has so much poise provided by her faith that her godly mind (she'd never slept with anybody nor would she until she was married) came up with this question, "How will this be since I am a virgin?" Good question, Mary! How is this going to happen? Then, and I think this so often gets lost in the Christmas story, while angels danced and sang, while shepherds worshipped and told, God takes a huge time out in telling the Christmas story to shine the light on Mary's soul life: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." That's the Christmas miracle that I think we've overlooked for far too long. It's a Christmas miracle that cradles the baby – not in the arms – but in the heart. That's a Christmas miracle that has Paul gushing as he wraps up the book of Romans. Paul tells us that now is the time to: **Cradle the Christ!**

Sometimes it takes you a while to get to place where you cradle something inwardly. People don't cradle enough care and commitment in their hearts to get engaged usually until months pass. Wine connoisseurs don't start out in life cradling a commitment to wine. That's something you grow into. It usually takes a while to get to a point where you can genuinely care deeply enough about something to say that you cradle it.

I say that so we keep in mind that it took Paul a while to get to where he is in Romans right now. In fact, it took him 16 chapters of material to get to these verses. It took him hours of thinking, dictating, and writing. And now he's looking back over all that teaching and he reacts from a very,

very special place in his heart. Paul, a faith-filled, convicted, convinced, emotional man reaches into the cradle of his being and he holds up what's there for the world to see.

How do we know this is coming from such a deep place? Well, we can do a little comparison shopping. Look at Paul's other letters. Usually he ends his letters by writing, **"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit,"** like he does in Philippians or something else along those lines. It's something short, concise and to the point. Then he's out and he done with the letter. That's Paul's style. Romans is waaaay different because there is cradling being done.

Let's say you have an e-mail relationship with a friend that lives in Florida. Nine times out of ten they sign off lightly saying, "Take care! Sincerely, So and So" But this time they end the e-mail saying, "You are a great friend. I miss you tons and I wish I could see you soon! Your friend, So and So" You know from that e-mail that this time they're coming from a different emotional place. You might say they are cradling your friendship in their heart. That's what's happening with Paul here. He's just gushing. It's 53 words long. Think about that. This is 53 words of pure gushing. And it's all one sentence. Some might say that this is terrible grammatical style. Your lit teacher in high school would never let you get away with a run-on sentence that long. You know I'm right. I can see my lit teacher with her glasses low on her nose and that red pen in her hand furiously splashing red all over that 53 word long sentence. It's grammatically all wrong, but I'll tell you this much. Sometimes grammatical rules can't capture what the heart knows so you have to break the rules. Paul has something he has to say that he genuinely cradles in his heart and he desperately wants you to know it and feel it right along with him.

Now is the time to let that happen. Now is the time to pull a Mary. That's what Advent is for. It's time to have our own Christmas miracle; to take the time; and treasure the Christ inside. But we're too busy. We're too busy worrying about getting along with our mother-in-law on Christmas Eve. We're too busy rushing off to basketball practices, texting friends, and Facebooking. We're too busy being annoyed at all the Christmas shoppers who are ahead of us in line, buying new LED TV's, and picking up Nintendo DS's. We've got way too much Santa Clause on rooftops, sipping wine with friends, and baking cookies on the docket. Honestly, we're way too busy to stop, think about God, encounter him in his messages to us, see what he's about, and frankly, to get so wrapped up in him that we can't help but gush along with Paul for 50 words or more. And it's really not ok.

It's not something that's easy to talk about, much less to agree with, but our failure to pull a Mary is symptomatic of a greater evil: there is something profoundly wrong with us - with me. Our ADHD thoughts during the Christmas season and our flippant treatment of the Christmas message show us that we are deeply damaged goods in danger of the eternal scrapheap. Recognizing that in ourselves makes us ready to cradle faith like Paul did.

First, we cradle God's power. **"Now to him who is able to establish..." (v. 25)** God has the power to establish. That is the first thing that Paul treasures about God. Establish. That's a nice strong sounding word. It's so much better than set. You can set a tea cup on a table, but then you can knock it off the table and it shatters into a bunch of glass shards. God doesn't set faith in the heart so it can be shattered when the devil knocks us over. He establishes it. God has the power to give us an inner solidarity, an inner foundation that can't be moved. We cradle God's power to establish faith in our hearts.

Second, we also cradle his tools that establish faith. **“By my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ...” (v. 25)** God has a consistent and planned way to establish people in faith. He does it by the gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus Christ. A carpenter drills a hole with a drill. A hunter shoots a deer with a gun. You move snow with a snow blower. God establishes faith by the proclamation of his Son.

Third, we cradle the goal of the gospel. **“So that all nations might believe and obey him” (v. 26)** God has a huge vision. He wants all nations to believe him. God wants his gospel to grab the hearts of the planet. He is a globally minded God that wants to establish his love in the inner lives of everybody.

Paul was gushing about this establishing, gospel wielding, globally minded God. He’s gushing for good reason too. Imagine if God was an in-one-ear-out-the-other, rain wielding, Sub-Sahara African minded god. The first problem is that an in-one-ear-out-the-other god doesn’t stick with you. It heads out of your brain and out of your life in two seconds flat. The second problem is that rain can’t fix all of our problems. It can’t even fix most of our problems. The best it can do is help feed us for a while. The third problem is that if God only cared about sub-Sahara Africa we’d be left out in the cold – or, actually, I should say the heat. The fact is that God is a God that establishes himself by faith in our hearts on a firm foundation. The fact is that God wields a tool in the gospel that forgives our broken selves and gives eternal life. The fact is that God is so globally minded that he made sure the gospel trekked out from Jerusalem down the mountains, over deserts through cold and rain, heat, across the Atlantic and made sure it arrived to a little burg in Northeast, WI.

Here’s the most important part to cradling this information. You must realize it’s all personally yours. I think all babies are precious. It’s amazing how God puts them together into beautiful little people time after time. I think we all realize how precious a baby is on some level even when they’re not our own infant. Babies are always precious. But, and this is just my observation, that infant takes on a whole new meaning when it’s yours. One new mom recently said to me, “I just can’t stop staring at her.” It was her baby. She cradled that baby in her arms and in her heart. It was hers.

Today is the day to feel that way about another little baby – not in some sadistic baby stealing way, but in a faith way. It’s time to say about Jesus, “That’s my baby,” again, not in the way a parent sees their child, but in the way a believer sees their Savior. It’s about seeing in the stork’s delivery to Mary your baby Savior. It’s about foreseeing that little baby become the perfect God-man who was spiked to a tree. It’s about foreseeing in his future resurrection the proof in the theological pudding of our forgiveness. It’s about foreseeing all of that glorious future in that little baby and saying, “That’s my baby,” or better yet, “That’s my Savior,” just like Mary did. It’s time to cradle that baby inside your heart who came showcasing his Father's establishing, gospel wielding, globally minded heart. Then, and only then can you hear Paul’s words, agree with them, and gush with him, **“To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! (v. 27)** And that’s, forgive me the cliché, a real Christmas miracle. Amen.