

When my dad took my brother and me fishing for the first time, before we got to the lake, before we baited the hook, dad needed a fishing license. Being young children at that time, Todd and I didn't need a license.

Before I drove for the first time, I needed to pass the written test to get my drivers license. I needed to learn the rules of the road before I could just put the car in drive and zip on my merry way.

There were plenty of tests to pass and papers to write during my college and seminary days. With each assignment I was learning. Each class was a component needed to complete the requirements necessary to become a pastor.

What is interesting in our life's journey is that for a great many things you need some credentials, you need some degree or training, no matter how limited or broad in scope.

But there is one thing that you can do that does not require a test. There is one thing that people can do without formal education.

Welcome to parenthood. No credentials needed. No license required. No pre-requisite courses necessary. No degree attained. And unlike gifts that require assembly and come complete with directions in at least five different languages, there is no manual that comes with the child that is placed in your arms.

What did you know that first time your son or daughter was placed in your hands? All you are given is a fragile, totally dependent life, looking to you to provide clothing, food, shelter, comfort and when necessary, dry diapers. The first time your child cried at night, did you know what was needed?

This is the story that many parents face. And while we romanticize the birth of Jesus with hymns about how “no crying he makes” the reality is that he enters this world just as helpless and dependent as the children placed in our arms.

That is the irony of this day. Christ comes as one of us; helpless, dependent, needy, hungering for love. What did Mary and Joseph know about raising a child, much less the Son of God? What did it mean to have complete strangers such as the shepherd and sheep descend upon them with a message about how the sky lit up with an angelic choir announcing this birth?

And just who are these Kings bringing such extravagant gifts?

From the moment Jesus was conceived their lives turned upside down. Of course, that is true of any mother and father. The birth of your child turns your life upside down.

You rethink priorities. You no longer find yourself getting to places on time. It takes twice as long to do simple tasks such as grocery shopping, especially with little hands reaching out for things you don't want. Other grown people look at you like your growing a second head as your child has a tantrum.

Yet it wasn't simply Mary and Joseph's lives that were turned upside down. Their lives were but the very beginning.

Jesus coming is to turn the world upside down. Jesus coming hits us with the reality of just how dependent and helpless we are even as fully grown, intelligent, seemingly self-sufficient adults.

No we don't need our diapers changed. Yes, we can cook for ourselves and feed ourselves. We can go out and earn a living. As independent as we have grown, we are still in need of the love, compassion,

shelter and grace that was bestowed upon us as children. No matter how old we are, we are still children. The coming of Christ reminds us of who we our identity.

The Son of God has not only come but is actually getting in our face, getting in our business, and mandating our lives. He is bringing with him some radical ideas of what it means to lead a godly life.

Renounce impiety and worldly passions. Have compassion on the sick, the poor and those marginalized by society. Love your enemies. And if you think the word enemy is too strong, love the annoying neighbor who showers you with unwanted information, or the technical support person you call who speaks with a heavy foreign accent.

Whether we are parents or not Jesus birth means that our world is no longer the same. Our lives are turned upside down. Life is no longer me driven, or our spouse driven, or our children driven.

Christ has come that we may be reoriented toward and reconciled with the one who created us in his image. Christ has come to shepherd us back to God and God's desires for us.

God's desires for us are good. Our life is grace fed and grace filled. For it is by the grace of God that Christ has come bringing salvation to all.

This helpless infant was born long ago. This same helpless infant would grow up and give himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. In this way, the babe of Bethlehem has turned our world upside down that he might fit us for heaven to live with him there. AMEN.