

CHRISTMAS EVE  
DEC. 24, 2016

FIRST, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

IS 11:1-9; MIC 5:2-5a; LK 2:1-20

*In Good Hands*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

One quick look at a **new-born child** reveals a miracle...for those who have **eyes** to see, and **ears** to hear, and **hearts** to believe. Granted, births happen so **often** that most of us are **blinded** by its *here-we-go-again-ness*, its *everyday ordinary-ness*, its *just-one-more-mouth-to-feed-ness*...so unless the child is our **own**, we may just miss seeing the miracle in...every baby's birth.



Yet for those whose spirits are **watchful**, (and for the rest of us who *get it* every once in a while), one look at a newborn's **hands** is all it takes: tiny and frail – **caricatures** of an adult's; seemingly **disconnected** from the child's will and intent...yet still they speak of a perfect potential, a faithful future, a holy sense of hope.

Many of you got to see our Girls of God's Grace (or G-3) liturgical dance group in action last week at worship. For those of you who didn't, it was **incredible**. I have to tell you I had a lump in my **throat** and tears in my **eyes** when those girls **turned** from the manger and **raised** their hands, **pointing** to the cross as a reminder of the intimate connection between the ***rough wood*** of the Christ child's manger, ***as well as*** the instrument of Jesus' death.

No, **all** children have a special gift for working their way into our hearts. A child's visit to a retirement home is **proof** of the magic they have. Blank faces and far-away stares are beautifully transformed when elderly eyes fall on those tiny tots.

Now, I don't mean to **idolize** kids – believe me, throughout childhood our son and daughter proved their humanity ***and ours*** countless times over. Yet still it's true that children have an amazing ability to soften even the hardest of hearts.



A prisoner had been jailed for a violent crime. A pastor I knew started visiting him and the two men developed a relationship. One Christmas Eve, the pastor brought his wife and their new baby son to visit this lonely convict.

After an awkward introduction, the man asked the young mother, *Can I hold your baby?* With only a brief hesitation, she placed her child in the care of this once violent man. The nod from her husband was enough to say, *He's in good hands.*

Of course, **Hollywood** has capitalized on this theme as well. In the 1997 movie Con Air, Nicholas Cage plays a former Army Ranger who was jailed for hurting some men with his bare hands in a fight.

He's part of a group of prisoners being transported by plane, some to another prison and a precious few, like him, to freedom, their sentences fulfilled.

Yet, suddenly a group of convicts **seize control** of the aircraft and land the plane at a little used airfield where everyone is set free, including the most violent criminal of all, a man called the "Marietta Mangler." He who had been shackled, hands and feet, and locked in his own little cage on the plane, was now free to wander through the nearby town.



Before long, the camera zooms in on a local little girl having a backyard tea party with dolls, stuffed animals, and, sure enough, her *new found friend* – the Marietta Mangler!

The tension *mounts* and just when you fear that the murderer is going to **do** something **terrible**, the girl starts to *sing*: *He's got the whole world in his hands* (4 X).

As it turns out, God indeed has the *whole world* AND that little girl in his very good hands!! For then we see a close up of the Mangler with a confused but happy look on his face, as he **too** sings: *He's got the whole world in his hands...* It sure looks like a miracle, for her innocence seems to help this man of violence dare to believe that even **he** might be welcomed and held in the good hands of Almighty God.

**Now** I'd like you to imagine that young family on the very first Christmas night: the hard travel; the search for a room; the decision, finally, to settle down in a barn...the hands that:  
 -**ready** straw for a bed,  
 -**clench** into fists during the pangs of birth,  
 -**cut** the cord, that **clean** the child, that **hold** the tiny newborn close...  
 -**he** *was in good hands*.



Next, think of that **child's** hands as they:

-made mud pies, planted seeds, caught fish, washed dishes, helped in the shop and held the scrolls of God's holy Law.

Then picture those same hands when Jesus' ministry began: -

**drawing** in the **dust** when the **crowd's hands** would throw **stones**;

-**pulling** a **girl** from her **death-bed** back into **life**;

-**touching** the **sick**; **healing** the **blind** and **hugging children**...

-**breaking bread** and **pouring wine** to feed the souls of his friends...*they are in good hands.*

Then imagine those hands held to the **cross** with **nails** as Jesus *cries out* to God at the very end, *Into your hands I commend my spirit...he is in good hands*, the **same** hands that are good *for you* and *for me*.

Professor James Limburg, who taught at Luther seminary, tells about one of their family vacations somewhere in the mountains. He and his *soon-to-be-teenager* son decided one day to explore a well-traveled path that went off into the trees. After a good hike their trail suddenly disappeared into a tunnel that burrowed into the side of a hill... It was dark in there.



Without a flashlight (and well before smart phones were invented!), the darkness caused them to pause... *Common sense* said that it was **probably** due to a simple bend in the tunnel and that before long they'd be able to see the light from the other end. *Shall we try it out?* he asked his son, who gave his O.K. with a nod of his head...and side by side into the tunnel they went.

Well, as the darkness folded around them, Jim said that it wasn't long before he felt his son's hand reach out and grasp his own. And that's how they walked, hand in hand, step by cautious step, until, sure enough, they saw light from the other end. And as the light overcame the darkness, Jim's son let go and out they walked into the afternoon sun. He knew that he was in good hands.



From the miracle of **any** baby's birth to the miracle of this **certain** baby's birth, you and I are constantly reminded that **we** are in good hands, the **good hands** of a **good God** who desires that you – and **all** people – have a **good life**, and have it **abundantly!**

Tonight we give thanks for the gifts we've been given, the gifts we are able to give, and the good hands of God that keep and guide us as we learn to give of ourselves that the Light of the World might overcome the darkness of life for everyone. Amen.