

From the Desk of Fr. Jerry

December 29, 2024

Dear Friends,

Families often tell stories about the birth of its members. Some of the stories are true. Some of the stories are mythic. Some of the stories point to the future.

My story begins at 7:20 AM on May 13, 1950, when Dr. Koff delivered me as the third child of Bud and Lillian. Now it was a girl and two boys, but more would come later. While I was still quite young there was a car accident. My older brother was seriously injured. He fully recovered. The repentant driver gave him a beautiful Schwinn bike (of which I was jealous). A parish priest befriended my brother and our parents. That's where my vocation began.

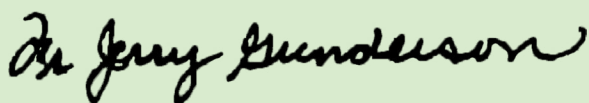
Birth stories influence our expectations about ourselves and our world. The stage on which we play out our lives is set at the beginning and a cast of characters is there to tell us who we were meant to be.

Families tell foundational stories to establish and maintain a particular identity/self-understanding. Stories like these are a verbal coat of arms for the family. By repeatedly telling these stories, the family is shaping itself and it is shaping its offspring

Luke's gospel begins even before the birth of Jesus with stories of birth announcements and long journeys. Luke is an artist who paints a picture more than a scribe providing an eyewitness account. He wasn't there. The gospel today revisits many of the themes by which Luke has painted the picture of Jesus' birth. Luke highlights the role of Jerusalem and the temple. He emphasizes the religious practice of Jesus' parents who made the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He is the only evangelist who offers this account of Jesus' youth. It points ahead to whom Jesus will become.

The story follows a pattern found in stories of other great individuals, who in their youth, gave signs of future greatness. Like Samuel, the boy in the temple who heard the call of God. And David, the ruddy youth who slayed Goliath and became king of Israel. The story suggests that the destiny of the human family and the destiny of this young boy becoming a man are inextricably connected. The moment preserved by Luke's story is not unlike times when our families face realities of life like the lost being found, the discovery of a vocation, the desire to strike out on one's own, teenage conflicts with parents.

Today, when the family of Jesus celebrates a mass just after Christmas, God continues to be at work shaping the lives of individuals and in the lives of families. God is still shaping our collective lives not according to some idealized or prefabricated model but according to a divine plan. With incredible faith passed from one generation to the next, families can respond to constantly changing challenges and opportunities with hope and love.



Fr. Jerry Gunderson