

## **“God’s Daring Plan”\***

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### **A Sermon Based on Luke 2:1-14 Westminster Presbyterian Church Christmas Eve 2011**

Hello, my friends. Fancy seeing you here. Don’t be so shocked. Haven’t you ever seen an angel before? Oh yeah, I forgot. Up until very recently, we angels had very little interaction with you humans, but then something happened. My, did something ever happen! By the way, my name is Gabriel. You can call me Gabe.

Well, how shall I describe it? It is almost indescribable, you know, but it was absolutely incredible. And yes, it really did happen. But if you want to understand not only what happened, but how and why it happened, I suppose I should first go back in time, say, to the beginning of time, before there were clocks or calendars or Christmas trees or even us angels for that matter, when all there was was God. And God decided to make a world. Maybe God was bored or maybe God was lonely or maybe God just liked to make things and thought it was time to try something big.

Whatever the reason, God made a world—this world—and filled it with the most astonishing things: with humpback whales that sing and white-striped skunks that stink and birds with more colors on them than a box of Crayola crayons. The list is way too long to go into here, but suffice it to say that at the end when God stood back and looked at it all, God was pleased. Only something was missing. God could not think what it was at first, but slowly it dawned on him.

Everything he had made was interesting and gorgeous and it all fit together really well, only there was nothing in the world that looked like him, exactly. It was as if he had painted this huge masterpiece and then forgotten to sign it, so he got busy making his signature piece, something made in his own image, so that anyone who looked at it would know who the artist was.

He had one single thing in mind at first, but as he worked God realized that one thing all by itself was not the kind of statement he wanted to make. After all, being alone was not as much fun as having company, so God decided to make two of them, which were alike but different, with both being reflections of God—a man and a woman who could keep him and each other company.

Flesh and blood is what he made them out of, warm to the touch. Since God, strictly speaking, was not made out of anything at all, but was pure mind and pure spirit, he was very taken with flesh and blood. Watching his two creatures stretch and yawn, laugh and run, he found to his surprise that he was more than a little envious of them. And it wasn't long before God found himself falling in love with them. He liked being with them more than any other creatures he had made, even us angels.

It almost broke God's heart when they got together behind his back, did the one thing he had asked them not to do, and then hid from him—from him!—while he searched the garden until way past dark, calling their names over and over again. Things were different after that. God still loved the human creatures best of all, but the attraction was not mutual. Birds were crazy about God. Dolphins and raccoons could not get enough of him, but human beings had other things on their minds. They were busy learning how to make things, grow things, buy things, sell things, and the more they learned to do for themselves, the less they depended on God. Night after night, he threw pebbles at their windows, invited them to go for a walk with him, but they said they were sorry, they were busy.

It was not long before most human beings forgot all about him. They called themselves "self-made" men and women, as if that were a plus and not a minus. They honestly believed they had created themselves, and they liked the result so much that they divided themselves into groups of people who looked, thought, and talked alike. But still, they just didn't seem to get along with each other. Sometimes things got so bad that the people began to kill each other.

God would have put a stop to it all right there, except for one thing. When he had made human beings, he had made them free. That was built into them just like their hearts and brains were, and even God could not take it back without killing them. So God left them free, and it almost killed him to see what they were doing to each other.

God shouted to them from the sidelines, using every means he could think of, including floods, famines, messengers, and manna. He got inside people's dreams, and if that did not work he woke them up in the middle of the night with his whispering. No matter what he tried, however, he came up against the barriers of flesh and blood. They were made of it and he was not, which made translation difficult. God would say, "Please stop before you destroy yourselves!" but all they

could hear was thunder. God would say, “I love you today as much as the day I made you,” but all they could hear was a bird calling across the water.

Babies were the exception to this sad state of affairs. While their parents were all but deaf to God’s messages, babies did not have any trouble hearing him at all. They were all the time laughing at God’s jokes or crying with him when he cried, which went right over their parents’ heads. The parents just thought it was colic or gas.

Babies did not go to war. They never made hate speeches or littered or refused to play with each other because they belonged to different political parties. They depended on other people for everything necessary to their lives and a phrase like “self-made babies” would have made them laugh until their bellies hurt. While no one asked their opinion about anything that mattered (though they should have), almost everyone seemed to love them, and that gave God an idea: why not create himself as one of these delightful creatures?

Well God called us on his cabinet of archangels together and shared his idea. At first there was silence. But I couldn’t stand it, so I took a deep breath, stepped forward, and spoke to God.

I said, “God, if you did that, we angels would worry so. You would be putting yourself at the mercy of your creatures. People could do anything to you. I mean, if you really want to become one of them, there would be no escape if things turn sour.”

Another angel added to what I said, suggesting that God create himself as a magical baby with special powers. It wouldn’t take much—just the power to become invisible, maybe, or the power to hurl bolts of lightning if the need arose. The baby idea was a stroke of genius, we told God, it really was, but it lacked adequate safety features.

God thanked us for our concern, but then said no, he thought he would be just a regular baby. How else could he persuade them that he knew their lives inside out, unless he lived one like theirs? There was a risk. He knew that. Okay, there was a high risk, but that was part of what he wanted his creatures to know: that he was willing to risk everything to get close to them, in hopes that they might love him again.

It was a daring plan, I tell you, but once we angels saw that God was dead set on it, we broke into applause—not the uproarious kind, but the steady kind that goes on and on when you have witnessed something you know you will never see again.

While we were clapping, God turned around and left the cabinet chamber, shedding his robe as he went. Then a strange thing happened. Where the robes had fallen, the floor melted and opened up to reveal a brown pasture speckled with sheep and right in the middle of them a bunch of shepherds sitting around a campfire drinking wine out of a skin. It was hard to say who was more startled, we angels or those shepherds, but as the shepherds looked up, I found myself being pushed by the other angels to the edge of the hole. Looking down at the human beings who were trying to hide behind each other (poor things, no wings), I just felt compelled to speak from the heart. I said, “Do not be afraid; for see—I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

And away up the hill, from the direction of town, came the sound of a newborn baby’s cry. My friends, I invite you now to go and see this good news of great joy for yourself. I tell you, the world will now never be the same again.

\*Adapted from Barbara Brown Taylor