

The Upstate Update

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Christmas 2018
John Stanley Macholz, Bishop
Upstate New York Synod-ELCA

In sixth grade our daughter Barbara entered a city-wide essay contest sponsored by Rochester's Democrat and Chronicle, the daily paper. The focus of the essay was this question: "What's important in life?" When the dust settled she won First Place and was invited to a reception at one of the local radio stations which helped sponsor the contest. It was there that she received a \$500 savings bond which is still maturing.

Barb began her essay with the following words: "It is important that the flowers bloom in the spring, and that the family recipe for potato salad is never lost, and that the family dog is walked every day. To me it is the little things in life that are important."

I've thought about these words a lot during this season of Advent and in anticipation of the Incarnation that is about to unfold. And as I've reflected over the past few years of life in my family they ring truer and truer. It is the little things in life.

This season of Advent, a season of hope and great expectation, is leading us forward toward a manger, a simple trough used for feeding animals. Nothing

fancy about it, nothing out of the ordinary, just a simple trough. A little thing in life.

On a dark night filled with expectancy in the life of a first time mother and father, that simple manger held the Word made flesh, God come down. Not with great fanfare and production but through the birth of the only-begotten Son of God. Truly a little thing in life, a baby held and cuddled and fed.

And in that 'little thing in life', that child in the manger, we, from this distance witness our hope, our salvation and our life in a new perspective. It is changed, once and for all. The world was expecting a mighty savior, mighty in word and deed, surrounded by armies and strength to bring peace and hope back to life. It was looking in the wrong places.

This Child, born on a most holy night, changes everything. This baby, born of Mary, announced by angels (okay, that might not have been a little thing), visited by shepherds and surrounded by the animals is for you and for me and for the whole world! In this simple little thing that takes place in this holy space and moment, our God comes to us for our salvation and the salvation of the world.

In the first cries of this infant we decipher the voice of God crying out in the darkness of the night with hope and promise. In the eyes of Mary and Joseph who look in wonderment on their child, as all parents do, we see reflected wonder and delight and promise of our God. In the quiet of the night, if we listen carefully, we hear this little thing uttered by heaven for earth: "I love you!"

It is the little things in life that do count when all is said and done. And this little baby says it all, for you and for me, for now and for eternity.

In the midst of the hectic nature of these closing days of Advent, pause occasionally to give thanks for the little things in life. The roof over your head, the food on your table, the people who love you, the furnace keeping you warm, the friends that surround you, the car that starts and the light switches that turn on the lights. Maybe take the time each day to write something down, some little thing, for which you are thankful.

And then rise and shine for your light has come. It has come in this little baby, this child of Mary, this Son of God. He comes to shatter the darkness and bring hope and new life. Stand at the manger, look into his eyes, see his love for you and give thanks. For the little things in life!

In the Coming One,

John Stanley Macholz, Bishop

