

**UNLIKELY FACES**  
*Sermon for Christmas – Lk 2:1-20*  
LPC, 12/24/09 and 12/25/09

I stay in touch with a lot of my seminary friends on FaceBook. One of these friends posted a link about “Worst Nativity Sets.” Now I love nativity sets. I own seven. How can a nativity set be bad? Or worse, or worst? I went to the website and I saw how. There were, of course, tacky sets. There were sets that were just plain strange. There was even a photo of dogs posed in a stable with towels on their heads. But the editor of this website had saved the best, or worst, for last.

This was a life-size set from Madame Tussaud’s wax museum in London. Madame Tussaud’s, as you know, creates wax statues of celebrities. And this was a celebrity nativity scene. Soccer star David Beckham was Joseph. His wife, rock star Victoria Beckham, was the Virgin Mary. Among the Wise Men were politicians Tony Blair and George W. Bush.

Unlikely faces to see at the Christmas manger, right? Maybe not that unlikely. Though I can’t help but question filling the role of the Blessed Virgin with Posh Spice, there is no face that is unwelcome at the Christmas manger. God saw to that.

Luke tells us that the shepherds were the first to bear witness to the birth of God’s son. Now, our nativity sets pretty up the shepherds quite a bit. Shepherds were on no one’s A-List in the first century. Shepherds were the last folks that respectable people would have invited to an event. But they are the first that God invites to God’s event.

Shepherds were unlikely faces at the first manger. The way that Luke makes sure to tell us about them suggests that there are, in God’s eyes no unlikely faces at the manger. There are no unwelcome faces at the manger.

I look out on your faces tonight. You have all, in a way, come to the manger tonight. Is yours a likely or an unlikely face at the manger? God says, no matter.

I know that people have brought different things to this service tonight. Some of us are thinking, “Oh boy, I can’t wait to get home and open presents!” Some of us are thinking, “How I am I ever going to pay for everything?” Some of us are thinking of loved ones we would love to be with at Christmas, but whom we will not see. Some of us may even be wondering, “What am I doing here? Everybody’s so happy, and I just feel out of synch.”

No matter. All these faces are welcome at the manger. God invites all of us, however unlikely, to God’s event.

For, let’s never forget that the first Christmas was indeed God’s event. Let’s not get caught up in the tackiness, or the sentimentality, or even the beauty of any nativity set without realizing what they derive from. God did something really special at Christmas.

This is God's event. God did something really unlikely. God, Godself, took on an unlikely face. God took on a human face. Our infinite God became a finite person. Our mighty God became a powerless infant.

Why did God do this drastic thing? To get our attention? Certainly. To show us the way? Eventually. To experience everything we experience so that we need never be alone? That's part of it, but also to make holy everything we experience. And to let the unlikely among us know that we too are part of God's great work in the world. No matter how unlikely, all our faces are welcome at the manger.

God took an unlikely face to bring freedom and healing and salvation to every unlikely face. Come to the manger, everyone.