

**IN OUR ARMS**  
*December 24, 2011*

When there's a single red rose with baby's breath on the altar of this church, we know what it means. It means that a baby has been born; that a new life has come into the world. It means that God's most sacred trust has been given to parents and siblings, to family and friends. This gift is the gift of caring; caring for a new life common with us in our humanity but unique among us in personality.

One of the greatest joys I have ever found in ministry is visiting new parents and their precious newborn. You know what newborns are like, don't you: the nearly translucent details of tiny fingers...the porcelain perfection of face and features...the startled wonder of eyes wide to the unfamiliar light of this world? And if I'm lucky, the parents will ask the most wonderful question of all: ***Would you like to hold her? Would you like to hold him?*** And I've never said no!

To hold a newborn treasure: nothing, you know, is more gentle or more grand. There is no trust greater or more filled with promise. ***Would you like to hold him? Would you like to hold her?***

Over the course of the first unfolding days and weeks of this infant's life, that question will be asked of grandmothers and grandfathers...it will be asked of aunts and uncles...it will be asked of relatives and neighbors...it will be asked of family members and neighbors.

Do you suppose it was that way in Bethlehem? When the shepherds knelt at the manger in wonder and awe...when the wise men bowed at the manger and offered their exotic gifts...do you think that Mary asked: ***Would you like to hold him?*** Do you think that Joseph asked: ***Would you like to hold him?***

My favorite part of baptisms is holding the child and then, with the child still dripping from the water of the font...walking with her or him out into the congregation...out to you...and reminding us all that we are a community together...that we are responsible...that we're responsible to cradle each baptized child in prayer...to teach each baptized child the content of the Christian faith and the compassion of Christ...that we are responsible, all of us, to hold that child.

***Would you like to hold him? Would you like to hold him?***

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to dedicate Him, Simeon and Anna were there. Even though Simeon and Anna had never met this little family from Nazareth, they sang God's praise and the child's promise. What do you think? Do you think Joseph and Mary asked Anna and Simeon if they wanted to hold Him? Do you think that Mary and Joseph laid Jesus in their arms?

When He turned twelve, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem. They trusted Him to the great teachers of the temple, and Jesus became their teacher. Mary and Joseph said to them: ***Would you like to hold him? Will you hold him in your minds?***

And then, you know, He became a man. And now another parent came on the scene. And, with the thunder of heaven, the Lord God almighty said:

***This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him! Hold Him!***

Tonight, the question is just the same for us: ***Would you like to hold Him?***

Dear friends, God is a proud new parent, a proud new parent beaming over His newborn Son. And – can you believe it? – God is offering Him to us. God is offering Him to us.

***Will you take Him?***

***Will you hold Him?***

***Will you wrap Him up in your arms?***

***Will you let Him fill your mind?***

***Will you treasure Him in your heart?***

And if we do...if we hold Him...how can we help but love Him...and how can we not give Him to this world? And we do that, you know, by loving, and caring for, and clothing, and feeding, and making a home for, and guiding, and teaching every child in this world; every child who has no one to hold her or to hold him.

Friends, God gives us Jesus tonight:

***Take Him in your arms.***

***Hold Him, and then hold them.***

***And God will hold us...and God will never let us go.***

***Hold Him in your arms.***

Amen.

Charles E. Mize  
 Union Congregational United Church of Christ  
 Green Bay, Wisconsin  
 December 24, 2011  
 Christmas Eve