

**Breaking News:
Bethlehem Infant Welcomed by Maryland Congregation**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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On Saturdays almost every week, the Metro Section of the Washington Post features subjects of interest in the world of religion. The page is entitled “On Faith”, and I have imagined how the “On Faith” series might handle a contemporary version of the “Nativity” narrative as reported in the Gospel of Luke.

I invite you this evening to accompany me “back to the future”, with a potential story lifted from the imaginary pages of the series “On Faith”, a story that in this day and age would fast explode on Twitter, Facebook, and in the blogosphere.

The headline might be: “**Bethlehem Infant Welcomed by Maryland Congregation**”, and the story might read as follows:

After months in frustrating limbo, a Jewish family from the Middle East is in the process of settling in what they hope will become a permanent home in Maryland. The Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a congregation of compassionate believers, has stepped forward with a welcoming embrace for an otherwise homeless baby boy and his parents. The family’s story is one of incredible circumstances, unimaginable courage, and international intrigue. Joseph and Mary, the baby’s parents, recounted their experience in an exclusive interview with this reporter.

Though it was somewhat surprising and confusing to both Joseph and Mary, the young woman had become pregnant for the first time. They tell of dreams and visions that influenced them to

depart their home in a village called Nazareth, where Joseph had a carpentry business, so that the child could be born in Bethlehem, a suburb of Jerusalem. Being loyal practitioners of the Hebrew faith, the parents gave their baby the Jewish name of Yeshua, or Jesus, which loosely interpreted means "Savior".

From the moment of their son's birth, Joseph and Mary knew there was something special about him. For one thing, farmers from the fields surrounding Bethlehem flocked into town just to see the child. For another, after a few days, three authority figures from distant regions showed up with unusually valuable gifts for him. When asked how they found the family in Bethlehem, the three said they had followed a star in the sky. Mary and Joseph were amazed at what all these visitors were saying about their baby, and it was hard for them not to feel a little proud.

However, they report that for some reason, not everyone was so favorably impressed. Joseph says he learned in yet another dream that they should leave their homeland, because apparently the officials in charge of the government were unhappy with all the attention Jesus was getting. Mary, still recovering from childbirth herself, but being the concerned mother of a newborn, reluctantly agreed to travel to safety. She was deeply afraid that they might never see their extended families again, back in Nazareth. It turns out her worries had some merit.

So Joseph and Mary again gathered up what little they had, and made their way with Jesus to nearby Egypt. There, being foreigners with a very strange tale to tell, and without any official papers, they were informed by Egyptian authorities that they would have to find some other place to live. A non-profit organization that addresses the needs of refugees, sympathized with the plight of this Palestinian family, and assisted their journey onward to a refugee camp in Italy operated by the United Nations. After a few difficult months in the camp, regaining their

strength and their faith, they were sent on to the United States of America, for what Joseph and Mary hoped would be a new life, a safe life—a life of unlimited possibilities for their son Jesus. That may yet very well be the case, but it has not been so immediately apparent, for three reasons.

First, since the family's recent arrival in the United States, a dispute has been raging among scientists, medical professionals, and even theologians, as to the nature of the boy's birth. It has become generally known that Joseph and Mary claim to have had no relations such as those that result in normal pregnancies. But the baby Jesus is living proof that something happened to them that has not ever happened before to a husband and wife. They are just trying to do what is in the best interest of their son Jesus—a life of unlimited possibilities--while the argument continues in the disciplines of science and religion about whether or not the story of these Palestinian parents could possibly be true.

Second, there is a rapidly escalating dispute among religious leaders as to the actual faith of the child. The parents are Jewish, of that the rabbis, ministers, and priests agree, as does most everyone else in the general public. But ever since the initial reports out of Bethlehem, there has been an increasingly popular, world-wide movement insisting that the highly unusual circumstances of Jesus' birth prove that God wants everyone to change the way they think about God, and consequently, the way they act toward one another. These believers are congregating in faith communities across the globe, claiming that the presence of Jesus has given them a new understanding of spiritual matters, and released them to a new life of obedience to God and service to their brothers and sisters in the human family. These believers in the baby have developed an attitude of kindness, forgiveness, and unlimited love that, while quite challenging to sustain at times, can indeed have the effect of improving human

relationships, and even changing the world! Meantime, Mary and Joseph simply want what is in the best interest of their son Jesus—a life of unlimited possibilities.

Third, there is a foreboding dispute among political leaders regarding the “immigration” status of Jesus’ family. It has to do in part with Joseph’s reluctance to admit, and inability to prove, that he is in fact the child’s biological father. The identity of the child’s mother is clear: Mary carried the baby in her womb. At the same time, throughout the family’s journey as refugees, authorities have been stymied as to whom to list as the father. But the even more worrisome matter is the current furor over immigration policies in America, because that outcome would have such decisive implications for Jesus’ family, among many others. The outcome could also impact those faith communities that have bubbled up as “disciples”, so to speak, of the baby, because they might be suspected of encouraging a spiritual revolution in his name.

Will this child and his parents be allowed to stay in the United States, and settle down in safety and security? Mary and Joseph simply want what is in the best interest of their son—a life of unlimited possibilities.

It seems now that the prospects for that are somewhat enhanced. As mentioned earlier, the Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has opened its doors to the family for as long as it takes for their circumstances to be resolved. The church recognizes that for some folks, there are scientific, religious, and political uncertainties surrounding the plight of these Palestinians, and in particular the nature and real meaning of this infant, Jesus. Yet historically, whenever the Hyattstown Church learns of an individual or a family with special or unusual needs, it embraces that family with lavish love. Until further notice, the members and friends of that congregation intend to provide a home in their hearts for Mary and Joseph, and especially, for Jesus. In fact, the members and friends of that congregation are telling everyone that they

simply want what Mary and Joseph want. That is, they want what is in the best interest of Jesus—a life among them of unlimited possibilities.

This is the story of how, a Bethlehem infant—indeed, a very special and already well-traveled Bethlehem infant--has been welcomed by a Maryland congregation, and has secured what appears to be a place of permanent support and advocacy in that congregation's embrace.

It is the talk of this region, and, in fact, all across America and the world, including back in Bethlehem and Nazareth. And it may soon explode on Twitter, and Facebook, and in the blogosphere.