

One Story? Or Two?

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

[Matthew 1:22-23, 2:1-12](#)

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The Christmas story is so old, we may not even be sure where it came from. Did you notice that the story, as we told it tonight, came from two sources, the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew? Luke has the musical version with the shepherds in the field and the angels singing to them; Matthew has the political-intrigue version with the fear of King Herod and the secretive departing of the wise men "by another road." And there are more differences between the two stories, which you can easily find if you pick up a Bible and read from the start of Luke and Matthew. For example, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary in Luke to tell her that she will bear a child. (Luke's is the female version of the story featuring Mary.) And, in Matthew, an angel comes to Joseph to tell him to take Mary as his wife. (Matthew's is the male version with Joseph as the hero.) The storytellers in our Bible like to tell this tale from different perspectives. Is it really one story, or two?

All of us have different perspectives on just about everything, don't we? Depending on who you are, you tell a story differently from someone else. You may have seen the film "Sully" with Tom Hanks playing Captain Chesley Sullenberger, known as "Sully," a Danville native, who saved the passengers and crew on U.S. Airways flight 1549. It was January 15, 2009, and only 95 seconds after take-off from LaGuardia Airport, birds hit the plane—later they learned they were Canadian geese. The birds felt and sounded like heavy rain or hail in a terrible thunderstorm. Going 230 miles an hour, the plane suddenly lost its thrust. The birds had entered the engines, and the captain and co-pilot heard the broken blades coming loose and smelled the burning birds. Captain "Sully" had never had an engine fail him in his whole career. Now both engines were gone. The basic rules went through Sully's mind: aviate, navigate, communicate. Air traffic control recommended turning back to LaGuardia, or landing at another airport, but there was no time, and Sully made the decision to land his airplane in the Hudson River. He announced calmly to the passengers, "This is the captain. Brace for impact!" (Chesley B. Sullenberger *Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters*, 2009, 235).

Sully remained calm, confident in his crew, and in his decision to land in the river. Three minutes after the bird strike, the plane was floating in the Hudson. The crew got all 155 passengers off the plane safely.

Sully's perspective of the day was simply, he was doing his job. He was doing what he was trained to do. But that day changed Sully's life. The perspective of the nation was that he was a hero, and he became a celebrity. (I happened to see him at a coffee shop in Danville, and I recognized him right away. He had become famous.)

The news coverage and the hearings brought him instant fame and a TV presence on the nightly news—none of that Sully ever expected. The country viewed Sully differently than he viewed himself. He said, "I was an anonymous regular guy—a husband, a father, a U.S.

Airways pilot. On January 15 circumstances changed everything" (*Highest Duty*, 313). A regular guy doing his duty? Or a national hero? One story, or two?

This year we have had a clash of two perspectives on the role of government and who should lead our country in the highest office of the land. The angry and, at times, personally demeaning, presidential campaign and the unpredicted election results have left our nation deeply divided. Even within some families, people cannot talk to one another about politics. Since the election November 8th, there have been over 1000 hate crimes, targeted at Muslims, immigrants, LGBT people, Black people, and Jews—a wide range of victims (California Council of Churches). Many people have demonstrated or plan to; many have yet to come to grips with the reality of how divided our nation is. We are becoming aware of how dissatisfied many people have been. We are truly living by two stories.

The question remains, how will we come together to be "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all"? And as Christians, how will we follow the Messiah, who promised to bring salvation to a broken world?

Perhaps we need to find our common ground. Perhaps we need to ask, how can we work together for liberty and justice for all? Maybe we need to create a common goal: to defend the needs of those who are oppressed. Perhaps the rich need to care more about the poor. Perhaps those with voice need to lift high the cry of justice for all.

For isn't that what Jesus came to do? When Mary rejoiced that she would bear a child and that he would be the savior of the world, she spoke of "lifting up the lowly." She knew it was God's plan to create an alternative world order. When the wise men left "by another road," it was perhaps to find an alternative way of living. And the baby they found was an alternative kind of king, not a ruler like King Herod, but a child who would grow to lead the world by the power of love.

The writers of these Gospel stories wrote from perspectives that spoke to them. The stories told different details. The shepherds heard one thing and the wise men another. But what they found was the same. It was the embodiment of hope for the world. It was just a little baby, not a hero, not a ruler, but a precious new life to bring hope and joy and promise.

When we come to the manger, as we do every year, we ask ourselves, how can this baby change the world today? How can he change our lives? Can the Christ Child be for us a new reason to hope for a better New Year? Can we hope for fair treatment of all people? For peace in the Middle East? For no more violence in our world capitals? For freedom for all to practice their faiths in safety? For fostering the common good in our communities? We don't have to be heroes. We can be just ordinary people. But we need to remember our training as followers of Jesus. I don't think we have to agree about everything. We will always have different perspectives, and we will tell our stories in different ways. But tonight as we receive the newborn baby once again, let us join together as one, to promise to live with love as our guide and to work for peace on earth goodwill to all.

