

The Babe: News from Mount William, New Hampshire

A sermon preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California, on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2025, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scriptures: [Luke 2:1-20](#)

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It's been a quiet week in Mount William, New Hampshire, my hometown. It wasn't a quiet week a dozen or so miles north of Jackson, New Hampshire, and I'll explain what that's about in a bit. First, I think I need to tell you about Maria Atherton.

Maria grew up in Washington – the state on the west coast, not the District of Columbia. When she graduated from high school, she thought she was very much in love with Butch Anderson, and rather than going to college as her mother hoped, Maria and Butch moved across the country. Butch's father, who moved to New Hampshire when Butch was 3 and his parents divorced, said he could get Butch a job working with him doing excavation and lot clearing. Though Butch hadn't really had much contact with his father since the divorce 15 years earlier, Butch jumped at the chance, and he and Maria moved to New Hampshire.

Maria and Butch made a go of it. Butch's father was able to arrange for the job and Butch fell in love with operating Caterpillar trucks and tractors. He became quite skilled with the backhoe and the front-end loader. Maria found work at a restaurant and joined the volunteer fire department. She was about a year into her EMT training when she suddenly lost sight in one of her eyes. She's been through a battery of tests at hospitals in Boston. Doctors at the Mayo Clinic even reviewed her chart. To this day, there is no explanation for the sight-loss.

What's important for you to know about the sight-loss are these two things: The loss of sight in one of her eyes didn't slow Maria down, and the loss of sight in one of her eyes meant she had to resign as a volunteer firefighter. I think it's coincidence that, at about the same time as they eye stuff was happening, Maria and Butch's relationship started to end. About three years ago, Maria moved out when she and Butch agreed that the relationship wasn't working anymore, and Maria ended up moving into one of the two small apartments over the General Store in Mount William. She got a job at the Chowder House waiting tables, and she started a business cleaning houses, which, it turns out, tends to be seasonal work: in the summer cleaning rental cottages between rentals in and around Mount William; in the winter commuting further north to clean rentals for skiers.

It was at the end of spring, a year-and-a-half ago, that Maria met Joey Logan. It wasn't long before they were dating. Joey has some of Butch's best qualities. Maria thinks he's "super cute." He's a hard worker – when he can find work. He does construction – mostly framing, siding, and sheet rock. He's a calm, grounded guy who likes to tease the people he loves. Now it's the two of them living in that little apartment over the General Store. And about six or seven months ago, they learned that, come the new year, it was going to be three of them in that apartment. They decided it was time to start looking for something bigger and Joey thought he needed to find a construction company that would more consistently keep him on the payroll.

That's why, this past week, Maria and Joey were on Route 16, north of Jackson late at night when they had to pull over. Joey had a lead on a job in Berlin – doing construction with a company that has a reputation for having work pretty much year-round and that respects hard work. So last Tuesday, after a full day of work and some supper, Maria and Joey loaded themselves into the pickup and started the three-hour drive to Berlin. They planned to stay overnight in a motel because Joey's interview was first thing in the morning. During the interview, Maria would check out Berlin and try to get a sense of what it would be like to move there and what the work options might be for a soon-to-be first-time mother.

That was the plan. Three weeks ahead of the predicted date, Maria went into labor. I've been told that a bumpy ride in a pickup truck can induce labor. Maybe. Looking back, they realize the labor started about the time they turned onto Route 16 south of Conway. At the time they thought there was no way the baby could be coming this early. It was probably just gas. Oops.

Things were progressing quickly, so they decided to go straight to a hospital in Berlin, and not the motel. They were a dozen or so miles north of Jackson on Route 16 when Maria told Joey he had to pull over because the baby was coming now. There, in the middle of the White Mountains, somewhere between two ski resorts where the cell reception was nonexistent, Joey pulled the truck over, put on the flashers, opened his overnight bag, and pulled out some clean clothes that would have double as towels. And he prayed. His prayer was just about as practical as it comes: "God, nudge someone to pull over so they can go get us some help." He had planned that, when the time came for the birth, he would be a coach standing up at Maria's head, not a catcher down at the other end. For her part, Maria was grateful for the birthing class and for her interrupted EMT training, which she put to use giving Joey directions.

A car did pull over. The driver quickly found out what was happening, and just as quickly drove off to get a cell signal and call for an ambulance. Maria continued giving directions to the two truck drivers who stopped to see if they could help. I kid you not: one of the trucks was transporting a small flock of sheep. By the time the ambulance arrived, Maria was holding her little baby boy at her breast and Joey was glowing so brightly you'd have thought he was high beams.

Joey followed the ambulance back to Conway. He never did make the job interview. By Thursday, Maria, Joey, and the babe (who they decided to name Joshua) were back in that little apartment above the general store in Mount William. News spread quickly and by Thursday afternoon, wise women from Mount William Congregational Church had dropped off several boxes of diapers, some baby-appropriate toiletries (soaps, wipes, lotions, and such), and some casseroles for the freezer.

This news got me thinking about the miracle of this birth – for every birth is a miracle. And I've been thinking about a birth that took place on the other side of the globe a

little more than 2000 years ago. Kurt Stuckmeyer wrote a poem about that birth two millennia ago, a poem¹ that could almost be about the birth along Route 16 last week:

*A darkened room
A trembling womb
Her sharp breaths cut the air
Now nearly done
The hour has come
They bring him forth with care*

*In early morn
A child is born
Their long-awaited one
With matted hair
He gasps for air
His journey has begun*

*A child's first cries
A mother's sighs
The sweetest song of all
Now put to breast
At last they rest
Asleep within the stall*

*Ten fingers, toes
A button nose
Like any child, the same
His father's son
His mother's one
And Jesus is his name*

And I've thought about the audacity of hope that Maria and Joey must have to bring a child into this world at this time with all the threats we face – climate change, the rise of tyranny, various forms of oppression and violence – not knowing how they will make ends meet, only that their expenses are going up with that third family member. But that is hardly different from what Jesus' parents faced, and the hope they must have had to bring their child into the world.

Will Joshua change the world? He's barely a week old; it's much too early to tell. Except, of course, he has already changed the world for Maria and Joey. Heck, they may even decide to get married.

In the meantime, I'll light a candle. I'll light a candle in thanksgiving for Joshua Logan-Atherton. I'll light a candle in gratitude for the light that Joshua, like every baby, brings into the world. I'll light a candle in the hope that we can and will make the world a

¹ Kurt Stuckmeyer, "A Child Is Born," ©2002 by Kurt Stuckmeyer, posted on Facebook on 24 December 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/followingjesus.org/posts/pfbid02pQPwrigwTjRnNo9JkbEvWhNoVTh1nxNyyxtjAWAKFyH7hChkvohNajXdmLKX3BN11>. The first line of the last stanza is originally "Five fingers, toes," but I changed it because I think "Ten fingers, toes" make more sense.

better place for all the children. I'll light a candle to shed a light that will help us see what is true from what false. I'll light a candle to help us see that we have more in common with one another than the small differences that make us unique. I'll light a candle to help us see the road that leads us away from conflict and into a peace that brings justice for all.

That's the news from Mount William, New Hampshire, where all the women are strong, the men are good looking, and the children go to Sunday School every week.