

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In academia, journalism, and politics unattributed plagiarism is considered unethical. However, in preaching it is not only accepted, but the expected norm. However, tonight I am happy to attribute the story I am about to tell to my friend and colleague, Pastor Mary Lewis of Parkesburg Baptist Church. In the December Newsletter of the Church, Pastor Mary shares a delightful story, *THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP*, written by Bret Harte back in the late 1800s. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Roaring Camp was the meanest mining town in all the West. They had more murders, fights, thefts, carousing, and drunkenness than any place around. It was a terrible town inhabited entirely by big tough miners—and one woman, named Cherokee Sal. While giving birth, Cherokee Sal died, and no one even tried to guess who the father might be.

The baby survived, and the miners thought, “What in the world are we going to do with a baby?” So, they wrapped the baby in old rags and put it in a box. But they quickly realized that the box was not good enough or clean enough to hold the baby. So, one of the men was sent to a town 80 miles away to buy a beautiful new rosewood cradle. When they put the baby in the new cradle, the rags didn’t look right. So they sent another man all the way to Sacramento, and he came back with blankets of silk and lace. They wrapped the baby in the new blankets and placed him in the new cradle. Then they noticed how filthy the floor was. So they got down on their hands and knees and scrubbed the floor.

Of course that made the walls and ceiling and the dirty window without curtains look absolutely terrible. So they washed down the walls and ceiling, painted them, and put up some nice curtains on the window. Finally, they felt the baby’s room was perfect. Then the men realized they had to stop fighting because it woke the baby up and scared him.

All the miners loved the baby so each day they took him to the entrance of the mine so they could keep an eye on him and keep him safe. But then they noticed that the entrance of the mine was dirty and unattractive. They proceeded to plant a garden of beautiful, aromatic flowers and plants to delight the baby. They loved to reach out and just touch the baby, but their hands looked so dirty next to the baby’s. Pretty soon, the general store had sold out of bath soap and laundry detergent and shaving kits.

Without a single sermon being preached or religious service being held, life in Roaring Camp had been transformed. The men had given up their hard, tough, hostile, profane ways all for the love of a baby!

The story is, of course, a work of fiction, but it isn’t such a stretch to imagine how the birth of a baby can transform the most hardened of hearts. The Baby whose birth we celebrate tonight indeed has the power to transform our hearts in ways beyond our imagining if we will let Him. Tonight I invite you to come forward with the same wonder and awe as the miners in the story, or, perhaps, as the shepherds in the Gospel. As you look upon our precious Infant, pray that your heart be transformed by Christ being born in you again. Please come to greet our Christ Child as you do in the Communion Procession.