

What an upside down, topsy turvy situation that John finds himself in. Imagine for a moment, that you are John... John the baptizer. There's not a lot that we know about you... but there are two things we do know for certain. First... you're convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that the long wait is over. The messiah, the savior... is coming... and coming soon. Second... you believe that it's your sole mission in life to proclaim that "one more powerful than" you is coming and that you need to prepare the way... to get people to repent their sins... and to baptize in the river Jordan. This is who you are and this is what you do.

Then one day, while you are baptizing... it happens. Standing in front of you is the one whose coming you announced. The one more powerful than you. The one who comes without sin and who has no reason to repent... and yet, just as you are getting ready to bow down in great reverence to him... that's when the upside down, topsy turvy thing happens. This savior and Lord asks you to baptize him. Furthermore, he says it's fitting and right that you should do so... thus marking the beginning of the official, public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

But perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised at this turn of events. At Christmas, we reflect on the coming of the awesome and mighty Creator God... in the form of a tiny, helpless infant. A tiny, helpless infant.

If you've ever held a newborn, and many of you have, you know that you need to do so carefully... protective of the precious and very vulnerable bundle you are holding in your hands. If you've ever raised a newborn, and many of you have, you know that over time... with your care and your work and your love... that infant grows into someone much less vulnerable... into a person who is strong and sure footed. But it takes time...

and patience. It takes our deepest desire... and our greatest faith. And it's not always easy.

“Footprints in the Sand”. You’ve seen it. It’s the story about having a dream one night and reviewing the memories and scenes of your life... and then questioning Jesus... saying that you saw his footprints along side of you, knowing that through your journey... he was right there with you. But during the darkest and most trying times, there was one set of footprints... implying that those were the times when you were alone. To that, Jesus says “au contraire... those were the times when I carried you”. It’s a nice story and a moving one. It makes a stirring point about our Lord’s love for us... especially in those times when we need it the most.

I don’t know about you, but I like that image. I like to know that the answer to every prayer I ever have and the punctuation mark I can put on everything I know about my faith comes down to seeing that one set of footprints in the sand and knowing that Jesus will carry me when I need it most.

But what if we’re called toward something different than that? What if our Lord and savior stands before us, but in a way that’s upside down, topsy turvy instead? What if the answer to all of our prayers comes less so in the form of one set of footprints in the sand... but rather... as a tiny, vulnerable newborn that we need to hold in our arms so carefully and with a great and nurturing love?

Maybe that’s how we’ll be called? And when we do, perhaps we’ll feel the way John did... surprised and bewildered and unworthy.

And just maybe the answer to all of our prayers and everything we believe about our faith needs to be held high and right out in front of us... and at the same time ...

cradled in our arms and encouraged and cared for like a little baby... knowing that it will take time... and patience... and that it won't always be easy.

We've been to places where it's uncomfortable. Where everyone else doesn't believe what we believe. Where we're afraid to say what we think... because we don't want to make waves and we want to belong... or because we're unsure of ourselves and we worry that we're not smart enough to defend our beliefs. But we take a shot at it. That's the place where we cradle our faith.

In those times when we resist our consumerism culture because it clashes with the values that Jesus showed when he cared for the helpless and the disconnected... that's the place where we encourage our faith.

In every opportunity when we put others first... when we extend our hand to someone who could really use it... that's the place where we nurture our faith.

And each time we block out some time to be silent and reflective... in a quiet conversation with Christ... instead of being bombarded by the noise and distraction of the here and now... that's the place where we care for our faith.

And that's the place where our faith grows.

When John baptized Jesus, the proud Father looked down from heaven and said, "this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased." That same proud Father did that same thing when you and I were baptized.

And so... you could think of our baptism as the moment that Jesus lifted us up and began to carry us across the sand... or ... you could think of it as the day that we took hold of the tiny, helpless infant in the manger and began our lifelong journey to raise up that faith and to nurture it... so that it would grow to be strong and sure footed and the most

amazing and spectacular gift of a Creator God who is profoundly and madly in love with each and every one of us. And you know, there's nothing upside down, topsy turvy about that...