

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church

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“Before I Formed you in the womb, I knew you.”

(Jeremiah 1:4)

Fr. Richard Molison, Preaching

Saturday / Sunday, January 30 – 31, 2016

Epiphany 4-C

On January 19, less than two weeks ago, Barbie and I became great grandparents to Allison Jo, daughter of Michael and Janelle Chiaravalle. It was my privilege to hold this beautiful creature when she was but only a few hours old. Holding this precious jewel gave me glory bumps the size of the Rocky Mountains – such an awesome beautiful gift from God. It's been quite a while since holding a tiny new-born, who, just a few hours earlier, was still in her mother's womb. I have to admit that it was somewhat scary holding her, so tiny, so fragile, so beautiful, so loved, truly a gift from God.

During her pregnancy, I recall Janelle being asked a number of times how she was doing and what experiences she was having with the baby growing within her. Her responses brought back memories of when Barbie was carrying our children. Through Barbie's experiences, we began to develop, began to identify, personalities of our child yet to be born, yet to be seen! I remember very well when Barbie was carrying our first daughter, Krista. I would place my hand on Barbie's swollen tummy, and suddenly, without any warning of course, there would come – for the lack of a better term – a jolt from within. Krista was quite prenatally. Her active professional and family life is a fulfillment of what we perceived prenatally.

The point is that we gave Krista a personality, we gave her character traits, even before she was born. Karen's prenatal experiences for us were pretty much the same – Karen's motor never seemed to stop running. And to this day, Karen's professional and family's schedule is exhausting just to listen to - let alone live. And Steve? He was the most active of the three. He was having a great time being inside mommy. We still believe he was a ten-month term baby, born 9 lbs., 6 oz. He, too, is now living a full and active life, and according to his sisters, he was the more mischievous one.

When taking into account the event of January 19 and the birth of Allison Jo, taking into account the memory dominoes that fell with regard to our own early prenatal experiences, I believe you can understand my reaction when I read the first line of today's Old Testament lesson from Jeremiah: **"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,"** I knew what the Lord wished me to share with you this morning.

There is much evidence in the Bible that God views human life differently than he does any other form of life. All we need to do is to read the first chapter of Genesis. From verse 26 of chapter one, we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness...'" Where in the scriptures does it say that God created animals in His image? Where in the scriptures does it say that God created the plants in His image? Animals and plants are not, yet you and I are! We are created in the image of God, created with intellect, reason, will, and emotion. You and I have the ultimate relationship with God that no other element of creation has. Our relationship with God is so unique that Yahweh God made us His representatives here on earth. We are given the responsibility, the privilege, to rule over His creation! Yahweh God separated man from creation by appointing him to rule over it, to be above the living created order. And God did this for our benefit. Wow!

Several years ago, the County Gazette in Franklin, Massachusetts, had this listing in the classified section: "Unknown item for sale. We know it is valuable, but we do not know what it is. If you can identify it, we will sell it for \$250.00."

What is amazing is that the paper had no idea what this thing was, but did know, somehow, that it had value. And the paper realized that only someone who knew what it was, would understand its true value.

You and I have value. The world may not know to what value we have, for it is only the one who created you and I that really knows what we are worth. And apparently we are worth a great deal, for Yahweh God sent His Only Son to die for us so that we might have eternal life with Him. We are God's most precious creation. From Psalm 139, verse 13, we read, **"For You (Yahweh God) formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb."** The Bible repeatedly states that every person on earth has value. Every person that has ever been born was born with the potential to do great things. God created each and every one of us with the ability to change the world in which we live.

"Before I formed you, in the womb, I knew you." So Yahweh God stated to Jeremiah, **"Before I formed you..."** It is interesting to note that the term *formed* is the same Hebrew term used in the creation account. In Genesis 2:7, we read the words, **"then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground..."** Unpacking this term *formed*, we find in its various meanings that it is related to the whole understanding of creation, a divine purpose for an individual at conception.

Yahweh God said to Jeremiah, **“Before I formed you in the womb** (some versions use the term belly) **I knew you...”** *I knew you...* To know is to perceive and see, to recognize, to discriminate and distinguish from others. Before we were formed in the womb, Yahweh God in the person of Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things, knew you and me long before we were conceived. He has plans for you and me. God has a purpose for you and me. You and I are distinct individuals, unique from all others. You and I are God’s children.

For many people, Psalm 139 is one of the more favored psalms in scriptures. I highly recommend it for home reading and meditation. Verses 15 and 16 read, **“My frame** (that is – my body) **was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth** (from dust we were created; to dust we shall return); **Your eyes** (Yahweh God’s eyes) **have seen my unformed substance** (in the womb) ; **And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.** Even before we were born, Yahweh God began keeping a record of you and me. We are intimately and personally known by Yahweh God. This is awesome news!

One of the more outstanding accounts of Yahweh God knowing us before birth is the account of the birth of the twins, Jacob and Esau. During her pregnancy, Rebekah experienced much discomfort within her. Scripture states that the children struggled within her. That prenatal struggle continued well after their birth.

Ah, but the sceptics say, *“That is the Old Testament! What does the New Testament say?”* We have no further to look than to the Christmas story. From the Gospel of Matthew, we read in chapter one that Joseph gave serious consideration to divorcing Mary because of his perceived understanding that their engagement vows were violated. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph saying, **“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”** God told Joseph, as well as to you and me, that he knows us, knows who we are, and yes, even what gender we are, before we are born! God even uses personal pronouns to describe children still in the womb. God knows! *Even before you were born, I knew you....* Jeremiah.

Another New Testament incidence. From the Gospel of Luke, we read in chapter one Mary visiting her cousin, Elizabeth, the wife of Zachariah, pregnant with John the Baptist. Do you remember what happened when Mary first arrived at Elizabeth’s house? Scripture records that **“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”** John the Baptist, from the womb, knew of the presence of Jesus, also still in Mary’s womb.

Unborn children hear, feel, and re-act to stimulus. And notice that Luke uses the term *baby*. It was a baby; it was a child that leapt in Elizabeth's womb. This child revealed a personality, a character trait, that we would all come to know as the one who rejoiced in the Lord, so much so, that he heralded the coming of the Anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ! Did Yahweh God know John the Baptist before he was born? I believe we all know the answer to that question is an unequivocal "Yes!"

Psalms 139 reads in part, **"It is He who made us, and not we ourselves."** The Bible wants you to know that God loves you so much that He created you and me in His own image. God wants you to know that Christ came into the world for only one reason – to die on the cross for you and me. Jesus, at the command of the Father, died for us so that we may have life, life abundantly and eternally. Such is the depth of His love for us. Why? Because we were created by Him, and for Him. Life begins with God. We are much loved by our Creator. **"Before you were born, I knew you."**

Why were we created? From Ephesians 2:10, we read: **For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.** Everyone has the potential to do great things for God, which is the very reason we were created. We were created in Jesus Christ to do good works. I believe there is some perception, some awareness among you, about my partiality for Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine..."

Jeremiah was set apart and appointed for the job he was going to do. Now, Jeremiah's father, Hilkiah, and his wife, did not know that when they learned they were going to have a baby. Jeremiah did not know what God's plans were for him when he was a small boy playing in the surrounding countryside. None of the uncles, aunts, cousins, and even great grandparents, did not know what plans God had for Jeremiah. But God knew. And you can make an iron-clad biblical case that God has a plan and purpose for every one's life. Yes, God has a plan and a purpose for all of us, for you and for me. All it takes is to submit to His will to learn what the Lord has in mind for you.

For Allison Jo, our excitement is to see revealed the plans the Lord has for her. God Bless her! And God Bless you all in the fulfilment of the plans God has laid for you!

Now to God who forever is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen.