

What's the riskiest thing you've done?

What's the biggest chance you've taken?

A new job that moved you across the country,
to a place you knew no one?

Maybe leaving a career that was lucrative and
comfortable,

to follow a dream and a passion that will surely
make you seem less successful in the eyes of the
world?

Or maybe asking someone on a date?

Or to marry you?

The risk of sharing all of life's ups and downs,
taking and embracing the whole of that one person
for the rest of your life--
in sickness and in health?

Of course, I guess you could say you're also risking that they'll
say "no" to your proposal...

Maybe you've taken the risk of making a really big decision about
medical care, for you or for someone else,
when no result is guaranteed,
and all the choices offered feel shaky and scary.

Our nature is typically either inclined to take risks,
or to be more cautious about them.

But risks are part of life, for sure.

From the small, seemingly insignificant,
to the big, life-altering choices we
make,

Risk is always present.

And the presence of risk makes us vulnerable.

We take a chance,

we step out on a limb,

And go for it,

knowing that things could either totally
unravel. . .

or stick in place perfectly. . . .

Or somewhere in between.

We don't know.

That's why it's risky.

Maybe you've even taken a risk coming here tonight.

In truth, we all have.

Together we are risking a belief that there's something more--

Something more than the presents we just finished
wrapping. . .

Something more than the holiday parties and
gatherings,

as beautiful as those may be,
Or as awkward as those may be.
Together we are risking a belief that there's something more--
Something more than the constantly crushing news of this
world. . .

Something more than the daily grind,
Something more than, well, this life.
Together tonight we are risking a belief in something more.

But we are in good company in our risk-taking.

Joseph took a huge risk sticking by Mary through a
pregnancy that came out of the blue and that wasn't his.

Mary took a huge risk by trusting the angel Gabriel,
Carrying the Son of God in her womb,
Serving as God's conduit through whom the
Messiah would be birthed.

The shepherds took a risk in the midst of being terrified by
the angel and the glory of the Lord coming upon them in the
middle of the field,

They took a risk,
And went to Bethlehem,
Right then and there.

All of these risks were taken in the name of God,
The greatest risk-taker of them all.

God, who steps out on a limb,
Takes a chance,

Goes for it. . .

All for us.

God, who becomes vulnerable, a baby, for us.

Madeleine L'Engle penned the following poem, entitled *The Risk of Birth*, Christmas 1973.

*This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war & hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn
That time runs out & the sun burns late.
That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honour & truth were trampled by scorn—
Yet here did the Saviour make his home.
When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by a comet the sky is torn—
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.*

Love takes the risk of birth.

God takes the risk of birth.

What could God possibly accomplish by sending Love incarnate--

Jesus Christ--down to us,

to save us?

How could we possibly be worth it?

God takes a huge risk on us--

The risk that we're not going to do anything with this gift of Love.

That we'll look at it,

and put it back on the shelf,

Maybe pull it out again next year.

God takes a huge risk on us.

The risk that we'll take this gift for granted,

Or keep it all to ourselves,

Or twist it into a gift that looks more like what we want it to look like.

God takes a huge risk on us--

The risk of birthing the Son of God into a world that won't accept him or believe him or care about him.

The risk of death of that same Son of God by those who don't accept, or believe, or care.

The risk of raising that Son of God from the grave to show how far God is willing to go. . .

Even for those who don't accept, or believe, or care.

To God,

the risk of birth,

The risk of death,

The risk of resurrection for us is worth it,
and continues to be worth it,

and will always be worth it.

When we would've long given up,

God takes that risk of Love over and over again.

Even when we turn away,

even when we forget.

Even when we completely miss it.

Even when we doubt it.

Even when we mess up.

Even when we get angry at each other,

at ourselves,

at life,

and at God.

God takes the risk of coming into the world,

Of being birthed,

In order to save us from the risk of sin and death.

God takes the risk of washing us clean in baptism,

Knowing that we will inevitably get dirty in sin again,

But promising that that dirt won't define us,

That Jesus Christ will.

God takes the risk of feeding us Christ's body and blood,

Knowing that we will inevitably forget the taste and the fullness it brings our bodies, what forgiveness feels like.

Knowing that we will feel empty again,

And that we will forget Jesus' presence within us,

Jesus' body uniting us as one body.

God promises, though,

To keep filling us with this bread and wine,

To keep reminding us that our emptiness does not
define us,
But Jesus Christ does.

God, the great risk-taker,
Meets us here.
And all that we've brought with us.
Our uncertainties,
And our confidence.
Our doubts,
And our clarity.
Our sickness,
And our health.
Our brokenness,
And our put-togetherness,
Whether we're patched up and just barely
holding it together,
Or we're doing pretty well.

However we are tonight,
Whoever we are tonight,
The fact is that life will be both kind and unkind to us in
the time between this Christmas and next,
And we are taking a risk that the God who meets
us here in the form of a baby,
Risking birth,
One day risking death,
Three days later risking
resurrection--
We are taking a risk that this God is for real,

And that this God brings promise and hope and
abundant mercy to our life,
And to our death.

We take this risk because God,
The great risk-taker,
First took a risk on us.

When is the time for love to be born?

It may never make sense,
And it may always be risky.
But God has chosen to be born for us.
Every day,
God chooses to be born for us, to save us.
Because forever,
God's Love will take the risk of birth.