

"And the grace of God was on him," says Luke in his account of Jesus' presentation in the temple.

But if you think about it, isn't that true of every little girl and boy when they come into the world? Aren't all of God's children blessed at their birth?

Simeon and Anna, two holy people who have been awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises, offer some mighty prophecies about the infant Jesus. But don't all families have big dreams and grand visions for a new child? As we hold a little one in our arms, as we gaze into her face, don't we, too, see wonderful things in their future?

When I was born, my mother told me, I looked to her like "peaches and cream," and one of my aunts predicted I'd be a famous diplomat. While the "famous" part has not come true, some who know me would say I'm diplomatic.

And when my brother Peter came along, my father, in his elation at the birth of his first boy, put on his record of Handel's "Messiah," and sang "Unto us a son is born."

I'm sure each of you can recall stories of your family's excited, delighted welcoming of little Johnny or Wendy or Fred or Shirley into the family.

We look at babies and see outstanding athletes, brilliant scientists and artists, valiant heroes -- all the wonderful things our love can conjure.

And then something happens -- after a few weeks or a few months of broken sleep, after a few thousand changes of dirty diapers, we lose sight of the magic and the promise of that new life. The child is still there, with all the potential he had in his first moments, but we have been too busy doing what needed to be done to keep it in view. Except, perhaps, when one of those notable firsts occurs -- first words, first steps, first time the baby says, "No!"

My point is, yes, the child Jesus was special, and he was given a special mission. But really, all babies are special. Jesus was named by an angel before he was conceived, Luke tells us. But every child is named as God's beloved and carries the hopes and dreams of a family and a community. We are all, in one way or another, shaped by the dreams of those who love us. If we're lucky, those who care about us continue to support us as they grow into our own dreams.

This community is great at honoring, celebrating and including our youth, and takes pride in its relationship with the Boy Scouts.

Those are important ways we nourish God's blessing in the young people around us.

But there is always more to which we are called. Can we extend the boundaries of our idea of family? Can we expand our notion of community? Can we open our hearts *even wider*?

And can we remember, as we go out into the world, that everyone still carries the beauty and blessing of the baby they once were? They may be wounded, like us; their souls, like ours, may be a bit tarnished, but the divine light is still there, still burning inside. I pray we will have the courage to seek it out, to look for God's light in the grocery clerk, the woman who is unhoused, the man sitting alone at a table in McDonald's nursing a coffee.

As the extended family of Jesus, the community of God's beloved -- and I mean adults and kids, too -- we are called to nurture the seed of God's love in all we meet. For each one carries the image of the baby of Bethlehem. May it be so.