

# T *estify* A BABY CHANGES EVERYTHING *By Curtis Arne*

“A Baby Changes Everything.” The name of the Christmas musical drama performed at First Church of the Open Bible in Des Moines, Iowa, this past year, held special meaning for one family. Centered on the church’s heart, “bringing people to Jesus,” the drama depicted three lives changed after meeting the baby Messiah: a shepherd, a census taker, and a maid at the inn. The role of baby Jesus was played by Chance Koval, a present-day infant whose parents’ lives had recently been changed by the baby born more than 2,000 years ago.

Several years ago I implemented Rick Warren’s *40 Days of Purpose* small group curriculum in a fall campaign. Church members were supposed to establish and/or participate in small groups consisting of church members, neighbors, and friends. One member, Debbie Berkebile, asked her boss if she could host a small group in the break room at the office during the lunch hour. Her supervisor granted her permission, which is where the story of how the Lord works in people’s lives begins!

Debbie invited one of her co-workers, Joann,\* to the Bible study. Joanne and her husband struggled with addictions. Although a believer at one time, Joanne had fallen away. Nevertheless the Lord used the small group study to touch her heart. Over several weeks Joann recommitted her life to Jesus. When she shared her testimony at her baptism a couple of years later, the congregation erupted in applause and praise to the Lord.

Impassioned to go out into the community and minister to those in need, First Church is heavily involved in the Des Moines Dream Center, a network of relationship-based community outreaches focused on meeting practical and spiritual needs in the Greater Des Moines Area. Joann was so

thankful for her renewed relationship with Jesus that she became a committed member of this outreach ministry, doing whatever she could to help those in need. Besides ministering in the community, Joann felt a special calling to go to the homeless. On selected Saturdays she and her family delivered food and other necessities to those living in tents and homemade shelters on the river.

Here she met Chaz and Candi. Joann’s heart really went out to this homeless couple, especially Candi, seven months pregnant. Joann appealed to her office associates, who collected donations. With the help of other organizations, Joann was able to obtain an apartment for the couple.

Hearing the soon-to-be parents were going to the Justice of the Peace to get married before their child was born, I offered to perform their wedding ceremony and we planned a small wedding. Just twenty minutes before the service, Chaz expressed interest in being baptized the next Sunday. When I explained the meaning of baptism, both Chaz and Candi asked Jesus to come into their hearts, right there in my office.

Twenty minutes later, they walked into the sanctuary where a few friends had gathered to celebrate the occasion. That was exciting enough...but on the following Sunday (with Candi eight months pregnant and experiencing labor pains), they were both baptized. The congregation rejoiced with them

and praised the Lord for “bringing another couple to Jesus.”

Proud parents of the beautiful baby boy who played Jesus, Chaz and Candi are both very active in the Des Moines Dream Center alongside Joann and her family...looking for others they can “bring to Jesus!”



*Chas and Candi Koval at their wedding*



*The Kovals with their healthy, happy baby boy, Chance*



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\*not her real name