

Church of the divine love

Sermon for the Christmas 'Day December 25, 2024

Isaiah 52: 7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4(5-12); John 1: 1-14.

Beloved in Christ,

Christmas Day has a different feel from Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve is about the excitement and flurry of activity that takes us to the manger. Today, however, is more quiet, less crowded, and calmer. Today is about slowing down, re-grouping, and taking another look at Christmas. St. John makes us face Christmas without the angels, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, or baby Jesus in a manger.

St. John tells a very different Christmas story from the one St. Luke tells. It's not better than Luke's, just different. We need both. Luke tells the Christmas story (**Luke 2:1-20**) with facts, John tells it with poetry. Luke tells it looking from the outside, John tells it looking from the inside. Luke tells us what happened, John wants us to reflect on what it means. Luke describes an event; John describes a way of being. Luke tells a story of particulars – "In those days" and "in that region." It's about a particular place, time, and people. John's story is cosmic – "In the beginning..." It's a creation story. Luke has us focus on the child Jesus. John asks us to consider what it means for us to "become children of God," for the Word of God to dwell in our flesh to the same degree it does in Jesus.

I think we hear this story about the Word becoming flesh and living among us and we immediately assume that it is referring to Jesus. I don't disagree with that. I think John is referring to Jesus, I just don't think it is exclusive to Jesus, as if Jesus is the only one in whom the Word became flesh. What about you and me? What about the power to become children of God? What about the Word becoming flesh in us? John is saying that the Word of God dwells in us and among us as one of us, that the Word of God is cosmic, and we can't escape it. It is everywhere. Every time we encounter the Word of God we are encountering the very breath of God, the spirit of God. Try this. Hold your breath and say, Merry Christmas. What happened? You can't do it, can you? If you are going to speak a word you have to breathe. When God spoke the Word into flesh God breathed God's spirit into our lives and into this world. That means every time we know beauty, experience generosity, offer mercy, act with wisdom, live with hope, feel ourselves reborn and recreated, the Word, in that moment, is once again becoming flesh. The Word has become flesh in your life and my life.

The incarnation of God, the embodiment of God in human life, the Word made flesh, is not limited to Jesus. Jesus is the picture, the pattern, the archetype of what the Word become flesh looks like. And we look at that picture so that we can recognize it in ourselves and one another. It is to be our way, our truth, our life. It describes who we are and who we can become. You and I are the continuation of the Word becoming flesh and living among us. So, what might that mean for you today? How will you let God's Word speak through your life, your flesh? With whom will you share that Word? What will it say to a world waiting to hear good news? What hope might it offer? What new life might that Word

engender? What light might it bring to the darkness? What if we regarded and related to others as the Word become flesh?

John has stripped away the usual people, voices, and events we associate with Christmas. It is not because they are unimportant. It is because THE story is bigger than their individual stories. THE story is more than a particular place and time in history. In one sense John is telling us the story behind the story. He is revealing the inner reality and meaning of the incarnation. For John the incarnation is the ultimate act of creation. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

We can hear the echoes of the Genesis creation story. "In the beginning God said.... And there was..." light, sky, land, vegetation, living creatures from the water, birds of the air, living creatures from the earth, and humankind made in the divine image, according to the divine likeness (**Genesis 1:1-27**). John continues that great story of creation. In the gospel according to John it is as if God is saying, "Let us and humanity be one. Let us participate in each other's lives. Let the Word become flesh and live among humanity. Let humanity have the power to become my children, born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God." And there was the incarnation.

John's Christmas story, However, is not simply one of continuing creation and incarnation. It is the story of ecstasy. Ecstasy is at the heart of the incarnation as well as every act of true creation. Not very often do we speak or hear about ecstasy in the Church. But Christmas Day, perhaps more than any other day in the liturgical year, speaks of ecstasy. The literal meaning of ecstasy (in the Greek, ekstasis) is to stand outside of oneself. It is a movement from self to the other. With the Word's becoming flesh, God came out of himself in a movement of love. He is the ecstatic God who comes out of himself to meet us going out of ourselves to meet him. God initiates the ecstatic act and invites our ecstatic response. For union always demands a double movement – a movement from God out of himself as well as a movement from humanity out of itself.

This double movement of God to humanity and humanity to God, the mystery of reciprocity, finds its fullest and most complete expression in the God-Man, Jesus. The Son of God became the child of a human mother in order that the sons and daughters of human mothers might become children of God. Maybe Jesus is the image, the pattern, the archetype of what the Word become flesh looks like. And we look at that image and follow his life so that we can recognize it in ourselves and one another. He is our way, our truth, our life. He personifies who we are and who we can become. Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas to all of you, happy new year and may God bless you! **Amen.**