

Church of the Divine Love

Sermon Christmas Day, December 25, 2025

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

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

St. John's version of the Christmas story is quite different from the one we heard Christmas Eve. St. John takes us beyond the external setting of Jesus' birth. In John's account we do not go to Bethlehem, we do not see Mary and Joseph, and there is no baby in a manger. We do not hear the singing of angel choirs. Shepherds are not guarding their flocks by night and wise men do not come from afar bearing gifts.

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. St. Gregory of Nyssa called it the "festival of re-creation." "This festival of re-creation is God's celebration of humanity. It is God entrusting God's self to human beings, to you and to me. It is God's reaffirmation of humanity's goodness. It is the sharing and exchanging of life between God and you and me. That's why the early church could say that God became human so that humanity might become God. The Son of God became the son of man so that the sons of men might become sons of God. Divinity was clothed in humanity so that humanity might be clothed in divinity.

How beautiful is that? Imagine what that means for us. It means we are holy and intended to be holy, not as an achievement on our own but as a gift of God. This is the gift of Christmas. We have been given the power to become children of God. This happens not by blood, or the will of the flesh, or the will of people, but by God. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us. "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, as St. Dionysius the Areopagite says, 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.

The incarnation of God, the embodiment of God in human life, the Word become 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. We see Jesus enfleshing the Word of God throughout his life. He enfleshes forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, gentleness, nonviolence, wisdom, compassion, generosity. He is our way, our truth, our life. He personifies who we are and who we can become.

In today's gospel John speaks of becoming or coming into being five times. The Christmas story as told by John is not just a story of something God caused to happen. It is a story of God calling. It is God calling for the Word to become flesh. It is God insisting that God's Word be given existence in the uniqueness of each of our lives. Everywhere we go the angels go with us announcing the coming of the image of God and reminding us of who we are. That is the truth of Christmas for us. It is also the Christmas truth for the person living next door, for those we love, for those we fear, for those who are like us and those who are different, for the stranger, and for our enemies. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us. "Ecstasy is the distinctive trait of divine love. St. Maximus the Confessor spoke about it in this way:

"Theologians at times call the divine an erotic force, sometimes love, and at other times that which is intensely longed for and loved. Consequently, as an erotic force and as love, the divine itself is subject to movement; and being that which is intensely longed for and loved, it attracts to itself everything that is receptive of this force and love. The divine erotic force also produces ecstasy, compelling those who love to belong not to themselves but to those whom they love.

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. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." The Word became flesh and has never ceased living among us. The Word became flesh and will never cease living among us. So, make way. Wherever you go. Whatever you are doing. Whoever you are with. Make way for the image of God. Christmas your way through life. Merry Christmas to all of you and Happy New Year my beloved in Christ. **Amen.**