

Christmas Day, 2006

Isaiah 52:7-10

Hebrews 1:1-12

John 1:1-14

The familiar narrative of the birth of Jesus from Luke's Gospel is the traditional Christmas Gospel. We read it year by year to hear once again the familiar and comfortable story. (Luke 2:1-10)

If you think about how strange the Christmas story is to academics, biologists, reproduction through a virgin, angels singing, shepherds leaving their flock to travel by dark of night to a stable in some backwater town of the empire, to witness a baby's birth, you will find yourself face to face with mystery. John takes the story to a new level, one that encompasses the entire creation, the Word which spoke all that is into being, became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

John does not give us the shepherds, Mary or Joseph, the infancy birth narrative, the angels singing but takes us back much further to the beginning of time – to time before time – not to align the birth of Jesus with the Davidic kingdom or the Mosaic promises but back much earlier at the creation when God spoke creation into being. The Word that was in the beginning with God became flesh and dwelt among us.

The prologue of John's Gospel is poetic, an art form, and it functions like a symbol to point beyond mere rhetoric to something much more profound. The Word is a means of communication, through which God reveals God's self in a radically new way. The revelation of God through law and prophets has failed to bring about the unity and brotherhood God intended for creation. The radical intervention of the Word made flesh is to renew all of creation. God will not abandon the creation but will redeem it.

Christmas is a celebration and recognition of a profound truth that we may fail to fully comprehend but which is the substance of our journey in faith. We come from God and we return to God. In the journey from our origin and toward our destiny we are given grace to see what human physical sight cannot see and to hear what our physical ears miss. The incarnate Word, Jesus, becomes our guide, our companion, our leader, our comforter, our model and example.

Our Christmas decorations were given to the glory of God by members of this parish, in thanksgiving for family and friends, and in memory of those we love and see no longer as they dwell in the presence of God. Many of us will have empty places at the dinner table and we need the comfort of knowing that saints on earth are united with saints in heaven by the divine bridge – the Word made flesh. As we offer prayers and thanksgivings in the form of red and white poinsettias, we acknowledge symbolically a deeper truth – a faith that transcends time. That is the message of incarnation.

Our weakness is God's strength; our emptiness means there is room for God in us. God did not choose to use power to overwhelm us; rather God used the compelling strategy

of being born as a human being to lead us back to our loving creator. God came and was born among us, quietly but with every intention of joining earth and heaven.

The gospel today tells us to be open to the intrusion of God in our physical lives, in our relationships, in our worship, in our work, our play, our conversations, and our contemplation. God is not removed in some heavenly realm unreachable, fearful in intensity, absolute judge, but through the incarnation of the word, Jesus, we see another vision of God: a friend of sinners, willing to eat with them, socialize with them, include them in his mission and ministry and entrust them with the ongoing work of the kingdom of God. The most unlikely of subjects become the bearers of grace, mercy, healing, and hope. Some very ordinary folks, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Thomas, James, were friends of Jesus. These men and women accompanied Jesus throughout the region of Judea and Galilee, heard the teaching, saw the healing and saw first hand the cost of the inclusive love offered – the political and religious opposition. God moves in unexpected ways and therefore we ought always to be alert and aware. Children often see what we miss.

A priest found the baby Jesus missing from the Creche. Outside the church he saw a small boy pulling a red wagon and in the wagon was a small figure of the baby Jesus. The priest asked the boy where he got the baby Jesus and the boy answered, from the church, sir. The priest asked why he had taken it and the boy answered, “I prayed to the baby Jesus for a red wagon and promised if I got one, I would take him for a ride in it.” The small boy took the symbol seriously and treated it as real – that is the truth of incarnation; the Word of God becomes the Son of God, in time and space, really.

Jesus was born in unlikely circumstances, in the midst of political and religious power that was oppressive and unjust. The prophets of old denounced injustice. Conflict and injustice marked the region of Palestine then as it does now. Proclaiming peace, announcing good news to the poor, Jesus by his solidarity with the oppressed, the lowly, the poor, the excluded, the marginal created a new community and a new hope.

If we take Jesus seriously, we will see the political injustice, violence, and oppression in our time. Is it Christmas in Baghdad? Is the joy of Christmas present for those living with AIDS or those dying alone and rejected? Is it Christmas for the hungry and the homeless? Absolutely, for the rest of us Christmas comes primarily when we are in solidarity with those deemed the least among us. That is why God chose to come as the homeless child of a poor unwed mother. God did not want us to miss the point – God comes not in a sentimental way for the pure, the blessed, and the pretty – rather – God comes for all humanity.

The miracle of Christmas is that God is born not only in the infant Jesus but in you and in me as well. The word became flesh not just to show us the divine plan but also to invite us into divine unity. We are the recipients of grace that awakens us to new truth that inspires us to see God present with us in every event and relationship in our lives.

Because of the incarnation, any and every dimension of life is open to God's extraordinary presence. In the most mundane circumstances, God enters time and space, to confer meaning, to connect us in bonds of friendship and love, to create new communities of hope, to give us work to do that is strangely and unmistakably part of the coming kingdom of God. Christmas reminds us that God breaks into time in profound unconditional love. Beyond the presents, the tree, the dinner, the family, take

a few minutes to appreciate the good news of great joy – unto us is born a savior who is Christ the Lord....this child...is also the word of creation made flesh --- human and divine to draw earth to heaven and heaven to earth, to reconnect God and humanity.

The poetry and artistic expression of John's prologue takes us beyond the physical dimensions of our Christmas traditions, beyond the infancy narrative of Luke, to see that God who was and is and is to come, is among us, in our lives, in our ministry, in our spirit, making us adopted sons and daughters of God. Rejoice in the Good News that God reveals a universal truth that transcends language, culture, time and space. The profound truth of the incarnation – the word became flesh and dwelt among us is that God is not distant, not in the past, nor is God out there somewhere to be encountered in the future, but God is present – with us. God is with us!