

First Sunday of Christmas – Year B
December 27, 2020
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- SERMON -

How was your Christmas?

Throughout this year's Christmas season, I've noticed more of a Christmas spirit than usual. Maybe more somber, but more Christmas spirit. Perhaps because of what we've all gone through this year, we've needed the hope and the peace that Christ provides so much more than normal. After all, this has not been a normal year.

Usually there are more conversations over the decorations and the tinsel, the buying of gifts and the parties. But I feel people have wanted more from Christmas this year. There must be more to Christmas than spending and decorations, because this year we're not able to have the celebrations like we have in the past. The tinsel, the buying, the parties, didn't happen this year like usual.

Surely, there's got to be more to Christmas than all of that. Is there more?

Yes, there is much more.

The readings this morning are exuberant. In Isaiah we read, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness..." And a couple lines down we read, "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent."

We have reason to be joyous!

Galatians says, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman".

How was your Christmas? It's a question I have asked and been asked each year after December 25 rolls by. While I understand what is being asked, I also hear an underlying assumption that Christmas is over. It is the same assumption that underlies the birthday wishes to Jesus. "Happy birthday Jesus" suggests that Christmas is the celebration of a past event, an anniversary. It is the reason why in at least a few homes the tree is already being taken down, the decorations packed away for another year, and the leftovers will soon be thrown out.

I raise these points not as a criticism or judgment but in recognition that we are event driven people. We tend to live our lives from one event to the next. If you don't think so, take a look at your calendar. It is a schedule of events. Our days are usually full of events. During a pandemic, these events may simply be picking up the groceries you ordered, or greeting the pizza delivery guy, since you're probably not going out for dinner. If there are days with no scheduled events, then we say things like, "Nothing is going on that day," or "I'm not doing anything that day," as if there is no life that day, nothing to learn or discover, nothing to experience on those days.

How different is St. John's understanding of Christmas, life, and humanity.

"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. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

This, for St. John, is the Christmas story and it is set in the context of creation, "In the beginning." Creation is not an event of the past, but the ongoing life of God with his people. John echoes and continues the Genesis story of creation, "In the beginning God said, 'Let there be...' and there was...." Land, sky, vegetation, living creatures from the water, birds of the air, living creatures from the earth, and humankind made in the image and likeness of God.

Christmas is God continuing to give life to his people. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." Christmas, says St. Gregory of Nyssa, is the "festival of re-creation." It is God giving God's own life to his people. It is as if God said, "I want humanity to see my face. I want them to hear my voice. I want them to touch me. I want them to smell my sweat. I want to live their life. I want them to live my life."

Major Ian Thomas, co-founder of the Torchbearers many years ago, said, "Jesus Christ Himself is the final exegesis of all truth. He is all that we need to know about God, and He is all that we need to know about man".

"And the word became flesh and lived among us." This is God in the flesh, the divine human, holy humanity.

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.

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."

God sees humanity as the opportunity and the means to reveal himself. Yet far too often we use our humanity as an excuse. "I'm only human," we say, as if we are somehow deficient. We fail to understand that in the Word becoming flesh and living among us we are God's first sacrament. Human beings are the tangible, outward, and visible signs and carriers of God's inward and spiritual presence.

Christmas cannot be limited to an event. Christmas is a life to be lived, a way of being. It means that Christmas is more properly understood as a verb rather than a noun. So maybe we should stop asking, "How was your Christmas?" And instead, we should be asking, "How are you 'Christmassing?'"

"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. Be sure to Christmas.

Amen.

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