

Sermon for December 29, 2019 – “Incarnation”

First Sunday after Christmas, Year A – Texts: Philippians 2:1-11; John 1:1-18

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And the Word became flesh. This morning, this first Sunday after Christmas we’ve made a long journey to be here. Through the dark places, searching for the light. We have journeyed through Advent. We immersed ourselves its darkness, we let our eyes adjust to it until the distant starlight began to peek through the darkness. Our Advent waiting and wondering finally led to the celebration of the birth of Christ. We began all those weeks ago with Jesus announcing the end of time, imploring us to keep awake, to open our eyes to the world around us. We continued on with John the Baptist who was preaching in the dark wilderness to “Prepare the Way of the Lord”, the Lord who will come to straighten our crooked paths. We then followed John to prison, to the dark night of the soul wondering if all these promises of the Messiah were in fact true. We heard the announcement. A girl named Mary would bear a child named Jesus. And our darkness, the darkness of the entire cosmos, was placed in contrast to the tiny baby growing in one young woman’s womb and we wondered if this indeed was God’s plan to push the darkness back and keep it at bay. To bring light, the Light of God into the world through a tiny baby born to insignificant people in a forgotten corner of the world. And then, just a few days ago we walked with Joseph and Mary to the town of David called Bethlehem. We submitted to the Emperor’s decree to be registered. We found that there was no room at the inn and were thus denied a place to rest our heads, so we hunkered down like refugees in animal barns. We heard the angels with the outcast shepherds, and we found out that God was indeed born into our dark world bringing real light.

We also discovered that this 2,000-year-old story actually according to some a 2,023-year-old story is a story for 2019, 2020 and beyond. That if Jesus was born into a world full of darkness back then one where tyrants ruled, soldiers killed, people lived in fear, that certainly the darkness of our world is not too much for God. That Jesus does come into our darkness too. The Messiah is born today, just as he was over 2,000 years ago. But today, John’s Gospel pulls us back from the details of the story.

John gives us the Christmas story again but without shepherds and angels, barns and journeys, without even Mary or Joseph. John takes us to the heart of the story. Here we find that the story that is older than we might’ve guessed, far older than humankind; John takes us back to the beginning of the story to the very beginning of all things. And the Word became flesh. John’s story of incarnation is hardly one we could reproduce with a Sunday School pageant. John expects that we can separate the **details** of the story from the **meaning** of the story. What does it mean to say that the God of All Creation has chosen to become incarnate? And what exactly does incarnate mean anyway?

The noun **incarnation** is derived from the Latin verb **incarno** meaning “to make into flesh”, or, in the passive, “to be made flesh.” John writes: “**...the Word became flesh and lived among us.**” The birth of Christ is the moment when God puts on the flesh of our bodies, when he takes on our humanity.

The divine “Logos” as John writes in the ancient Greek, the divine “Logos became flesh.” The divine “reason” or “plan”, the divine self-revelation and redemption, the “logos” of the Lord by which according to the psalmist the heavens were made became human and lived with us. How about that? The Lord of ALL creation according to Paul **“emptied himself, taking the form of a slave being was born in human likeness.”**

Wow. Think about it this way, when Mary and Joseph and the Shepherds looked into the eyes of the Christ child they were looking into the eyes of God. When the disciples and the crowds heard His voice they literally heard the voice of the God. When the lepers, the lame and blind were touched and healed by Jesus, they felt the touch of God. But putting on flesh isn’t just about our physical bodies. The incarnation is also about how God puts on the flesh of our **humanity**, the darkness of sin and suffering and death, the flesh of the human condition, of limited, fragile creation. God takes on what it means to be human, to be created, to be us. John’s Christmas story omits all the details that we tend to think the story is all about in order to bring us to heart of the matter. God has taken on our flesh in order to bridge the impossible chasm between God and a fallen, broken creation. God has become one of us in order to come near to all of us.

Sure, John’s version of the Christmas story might be missing a few of the familiar parts, but “fleshiness” of the story of the incarnation reminds us that of all our Christmas traditions the truest of them all is the one we carry on regularly throughout the year. As a matter of fact, we’ll be doing so next week. Because in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Table, Communion. as we share in the bread and cup we’re reminded that Christ’s body – His flesh, was broken for us. And we are reminded again and again that God takes on our flesh AND, in a manner of speaking, we take on God’s.

That God’s light and life comes near to us again and again. Given and shed for us. And as God comes near, as God becomes incarnate, God begins to reveal the light that’s been missing from our world. We begin to see just how pervasive the darkness was. We begin to see that even the smallest bit of real light coming into life through a young woman giving birth in a barn is more light than we can handle. We begin to see that God comes to us doing so in small space because even the smallest light pushes the darkness away, but the darkness can NEVER diminish even the smallest amount of light. “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” The darkness could not overcome it. The darkness could never overcome it. Oh, who are we kidding? The darkness never even had a chance!

As we began in Advent, seeing the dark places of the world making our way from the end of the world backwards to the beginning, to the announcement of the coming Messiah, to going with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and with angels to shepherds, John tells us that our destination was **here**. Here with the Word in the beginning.

Christmas is where God begins creation anew. Christmas begins all things new because the darkness of sin and death no longer has any hold over us. Because the old order of things has ended and now the Christ born into flesh has come today. In Christmas Story according to John, John goes beyond the regular details of the story. He peels them back to open our ears to hear, our eyes to see, our hearts to know that this story of a babe being born to virgin in a stable in Bethlehem is the story of God coming into our world, coming in order to be near us, coming to know us, coming to save us.

“And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son full of grace and truth.”

Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen and amen.