

Christmas Day – What the Incarnation means

Christmas Day 2017

I have to admit that for many years I did not like the gospel proclaimed on Christmas morning.

It is so filled with deep philosophical and theological language that it is difficult to understand.

Why wouldn't the Church choose an easier...better ...gospel for Christmas morning.

But the older I get, the more mature I become, the more I like the gospel.

I think part of the reason I did not like it when I was younger,
was because Christmas was always a happy, joy-filled time.

Family members came home, presents were opened
and basically a good time was had by all.

Now I am old enough to ask the question...what is the source of all this joy?

I mean Christmas is a joy filled season.

But it was joy filled moment before the tradition of
Christmas shopping, Christmas lights, Christmas cookies or turkey dinners.

So what is this source of joy?

Today we do not just merely celebrate the birth of a child...admittedly an important child,
rather we gather to celebrate the incarnation—God dwelling with us forever.

Think about this.

In the past God dwelt with the Israelites in the desert—in the ark of the covenant,
and eventually in the temple in Jerusalem.

However, both the tent and the temple are physical,
and over time they decayed and were destroyed.

With the birth of Jesus—with the incarnation—

Jesus is no longer dwelling somewhere out there (point),
in something that can decay and be destroyed.

With the incarnation he is now dwelling in here (heart),
living in a heart that cannot be destroyed.

Something has changed.

Remember the story of Moses—on Mt. Sinai—receiving the 10 commandments.

When he came down from the mountain, after conversing with God,
his face so radiated with the glory of God that people could not look upon him.

He had to put a veil over his face, just so he could converse with people.

In the old days...one could not look on the face of God and live.

But the incarnation ushers in a new era.

Now with the birth of Jesus we are able to see the face of God.

The child born this day is “The Word made flesh” that dwells among us.

This is Emmanuel, who is God with us. And we are able to look upon his face and live.

But the incarnation is more than just God becoming man.

The birth for Jesus has managed to do something for us that nothing else could do.

It has helped us remember who we are.

Remember the story of creation,
according to our likeness;
and over the birds of the air,
and over all the wild animals of the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’
“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image,
and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
and over the cattle,
and over the birds of the air,
and over all the wild animals of the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’
So God created us in his image.”

We are indeed created in the image and likeness of God, and we are temples of the Holy Spirit. (pause)
But at the same time we must stand before God
and give an accounting of what we have done and who we are.

There is a line from the gospel
“He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.”

If you do not believe that we have not accepted him,
then you need to sit beside me in the confessional for a little while,
and you will begin to see the number and ways in which people have transgressed God—
denied him—ignored him--rejected him.

I cannot even begin to count the number of ways, and times,
we have desecrated the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation reminds us who we are—servants—
and everything that we have, and everything that we are, belongs to him alone,
and that any power that we think we have—we have—only because God has given it to us.

This is something we can never forget.

* Because just as St. John notes,

“He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him”

he also says, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God.”

Meaning to all who believe in him, to all who celebrate the incarnation,
he gave the power to receive, what all the children receive from their father
their inheritance, and in this case, we inherit eternal life.

This is why Christmas and Easter are so intrinsically connected.

You cannot have one without the other.

Jesus came--so that we can have life.

And he could not have given us life--if he first did not come.

When I was younger I always thought Christmas was about celebrating the birth of Jesus...
something that happened 2000 years ago.

And although this is true—Jesus continues to manifest himself today.

The incarnation was not a one time event—it occurs every time a child is born.

The question is “Do we know him, do we recognize him in the people around us?
Do we see him s a small child. Do we see him as a homeless person?”

Because as we know from reading the gospels,
there are a great many people who neither saw him, recognized him
or knew him in any way.

I think it is because they were all looking for the wrong thing.

When we think of God, we are conditioned to see something ethereal,
semitransparent, glowing with glory.

But the only time that Jesus was ethereal, semitransparent and glowing with glory
was at the time of his Transfiguration.

The rest of the time he didn't look any different than you or I.

He was born in a smelly stable.

When he got older he walked on dusty roads, ate leftovers,
and grew tired at the end of the day.

If we do not see him in the people around us, our family, our friends, strangers, homeless,
sick elderly, immigrants and refugees—even our enemies...

it is because we are not looking carefully enough...he is not what we are expecting.

2000years ago many people missed him...because he was not what they were expecting.

Today just as many people miss him...because he is not what they are expecting.

But it is not all doom and gloom.

The first reading, from Isaiah, is about Jerusalem of days long past,
but it could easily pertain to use today.

Jerusalem/We are in ruins, but we receive the news of peace and salvation.

First the sentinels--cry out with joy.

Then the ruins of the city/all of us--are exhorted to break into song.

No longer do we lie destitute, unable to stand with dignity, without protection of honor.

God comforts and redeems all people--dwelling within them.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem/the people living today are now a renewed people.

Peace is no longer a hoped for dream, nor is salvation only a promise for the future.

Now have cause to rejoice today!