

Sermon for Christmas 1B
Sunday, December 26, 2021
“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”

Text: Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7; John 1:1-18

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“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... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”

These are the words of the beginning of the Gospel according to St. John that we just heard, and they are the words of John’s nativity story. There are no shepherds, there are no messages by angels, there is no singing by the heavenly host, there is no manger. John isn’t concerned about Jesus’ earthly lineage, either. Instead, John reaches back to the beginning of time itself, to the very creation of everything, and proclaims that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John wanted to tell his Christian community and the whole world about how God came into the world as the Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah.

When John wrote that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,” he wrote that God-incarnate became human and “pitched a tent” among us. The Divine One who created everything that is by his Word didn’t depose some great emperor and take up residence in a great palace; instead, he pitched a tent and lived among us as one of us. He shared our vulnerability, felt our pain, knew suffering, and eventually tasted death.

But there’s something else that this act of love achieved. John hinted at it when he wrote this: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” And in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he wrote that “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” What does it mean to receive adoption as God’s children? Paul answered that by writing, “You are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

Have you had an experience with an adoption? (Either by knowing someone who was adopted, having an adopted child, or perhaps you yourself were adopted.) Being adopted carries with it benefit of becoming a member of a family and an heir to the possessions of the family. St. Athanasius, one of the early church fathers who lived in the 4th Century, wrote that “God became man so that man might become a God.” That concept is called ‘theosis’ or ‘divinization.’ Now that doesn’t mean that there’s more than one god, nor does it mean that we’re going to get our own planet or our own universe to lord over—which actually seems totally awesome! It means that “the Word

became flesh to make us *'partakers of the divine nature.'*" "The Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods." We were created in the image of God, and so the Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that we might have a better understanding of what being the image of God looks like. The Word came down to us to take us by the hand and lift us up to something better, something greater, something worthy to be called daughters and sons of the divine, and be partakers of the same.

What that means for us is that, through our baptism, we have been adopted into the family of God, into the Body of Christ, the Church. For those of us who self-identify as Christians, this gives us the benefit of the sacraments of the Church and the guarantee of eternal salvation. Now, all people are God's children and all might be saved, because the power and decision to save belong to God and God alone, but those of us who are adopted into the Body of Christ through baptism are guaranteed salvation. Now that doesn't give us a pass to act badly because we know we're saved regardless—we will still have to answer for our deeds—but it does reassure us that when we do mess up...because we're human...God will forgive our sins, if we repent and return to him, and love us unconditionally.

But God's becoming incarnate and living among humankind benefitted all people living at all times in a profound way. When God came to pitch his tent among us, he did not depose rulers and take over the world by his divine power, although he certainly could have. Instead, he lived among us in the midst of the world as it was. He lived among his created order as it was so that he could show it how to be something better. He came in the midst of the world's darkness to illuminate it. That is the message of Christmas: God is in the midst of us—Emmanuel: God is with us.

There is trouble in our world today. There is trouble in all our lives. We live among the threat and realities of a pandemic, terrorism, wars, violence, inequality, racism, nationalism, politicism, pain, loss, death, despair, and disappointment. John's nativity story gives a reminder that the Word came into a broken world, and it was still broken when he left it. The Word was made flesh, pitched a tent and dwelt among us before, and he still moves among us today. John's nativity story is the beginning of the message that love wins. God pitched his tent among us to show us that it doesn't take an army or weapons or deceit or a whole lot of money to rule the world. Although, they may look like they do—and we may get that impression for a very long time—but in the end, love wins. God's light pierces the world's darkness and lightens our path toward the divine—toward him. Our hope is that we recognize that light in ourselves and in each other, so that we can be the images of God that we are and illuminate the world as to how rich and wonderful life can be in God's kingdom. Amen.

Resources

“Musings on theosis (divinization),” <http://www.biblicalcatholic.com/apologetics/a124.htm>

“Catechism of the Catholic Church,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a3p1.htm