

God Among Us

Dale Ramerman, First Sunday after Christmas, 2017, Yr A: Is. 61:10-62:3; Gal. 3:23-4:7; John 1:1-18; Ps. 147

At this point of the Christmas season, we're all probably ready to put Christmas behind us, pack up the decorations, put away the tree, and resume life as normal. Diane saw an advertisement in the paper yesterday offering for sale a 7 foot Christmas Tree, presumably an artificial one. Maybe we all have some of that desire to rid ourselves of all that stuff.

In one sense, our readings today help us escape Christmas. Neither the letter to the Galatians, written by the Apostle Paul before any of the Gospels were written, nor the Gospel of John, the last Gospel to be written, reflect awareness of the details of the Christmas story: no infant in a manger, stars, wise men, angels, shepherds or evil King Herod. Thus, Galatians and John, which both emphasize the importance of Christ's birth, focus on what we might think of as the big picture of Jesus as God being born of a woman, and in doing so, our readings give us relief from what, after Christmas, feels like the Christmas trivia.

For Paul, the big picture was that in Christ, born of a woman, we can become God's adopted children, and heirs of God. In Paul's words, "God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, ... so that we are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God." God's adopted children and heirs of God.

For John, the first chapter of his Gospel is John's Christmas narrative, but without the details we find in Matthew and Luke. John also tells his Christmas story in a way that emphasizes big picture: "The word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." God made Jesus known to us by Jesus living among us, and it is Jesus living among us who makes God known to us. And from Jesus we have received grace upon grace.

However we look at it, as a child being God, or God becoming a child, for us, 21st century people of the enlightenment, raised on science and the idea that truth can be found only through empirical reasoning, and with a Church that has lost most of its cultural support, the idea of God becoming a child and one of us, is a scandal to our reason. In the Gospel of John and in Galatians, the succinct infant narratives attest to Christ's humanity; and affirm Jesus' identity as divine, with the power to transform us.

The church calls Jesus, "the Son of God" who became a human being, the Incarnation. God become a human. This idea of a God becoming a human being and a human as to son of god, are not ideas unique to Christianity. But it is the Incarnation that has shaped and empowered Christianity. We do not follow and worship a God who is remote or distant. Rather, we worship, and give our lives to a God who became embodied as a human being and lived among us.

The implications of this idea of God becoming a human being are many. But for us, as a community of faith that identifies ourselves as followers of Jesus, God becoming a human being determines who we are and how we live our lives as his followers.

In the December 28 Christ Church Weekly Update, Sandy Davidson beautifully captured our calling as Christ's disciples. She quoted a poem, entitled **Now the Work of Christmas Begins**, by Howard Thurman, the Black civil rights leader and Boston University professor. The first four lines describe where we are on the first Sunday after Christmas. The last seven verses describe how we are called to respond:

**When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.**

May we begin this new year with renewed commitment and energy, as followers of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Amen.

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