



Mount Carmel Lutheran Church

Second Sunday of Christmas

Sermon by Pr. Christine Wenzel
on John 1:1-18 and Jeremiah 31:7-14
on Sunday, January 3, 2021

This reading, which I just read from the Gospel of John, is the Christmas Day reading every year. Today is the 10th Day of Christmas. After the hustle and bustle of Christmas preparations, and baking, and gift opening is over, we can finally settle in and hear God's Christmas words for us – A word so different than the sounds around the manger Christmas Eve.

A seminary professor reminds how it seems that the author of this gospel, whom I will call "John," for the sake of convenience - John seems to know next to nothing about angels or shepherds or stars or magi. He may not even know the name of Jesus' mother. John may not know much about the manger story, but he does know all about the heart and soul of this Emmanuel – God with us!

Today, we are gifted with a very personal and intimate birth story. "The Word became flesh and lives among us." This Jesus – this Word made flesh - has been bringing love, hope and new life – Jesus has been creating life since the beginning. These words are not unlike the opening words in the first chapter of Genesis – the Creation Story – a birth story of its own kind. As in Genesis, John is talking about a new creation. But, this time, God's creation which comes to us new through Jesus. It never ceases to amaze me when I keep in mind that Jesus is actually God coming to us in the flesh.

Today, we hear once again that God never tires of birthing love into this tired world. God becomes flesh and lives among us – this God who from the very beginning loves the whole world - this God who chooses to become so vulnerable and intimate with us – this God who comes to us in a way that is very personal and close to our hearts - especially in those vulnerable and broken places in our own lives.

There has been a lot of struggles in our community and in our world since we gathered for Christmas, a year ago. We have survived a divisive time in the elections. We are still in the midst of a pandemic that is still setting record breaking numbers of illness and death - causing much loneliness, and this Christmas causing us to miss our loved ones, with whom we would normally gather around us.

But, now this Word, which brought everything into being, is the same Word that comes to us today – bringing light into our dark places - creating new life over and over again.

Jesus, in flesh and blood, tells us who God is. God is about ordering a new creation. In Jesus, we hear how God heals, forgives, embraces, loving each one of us unconditionally. You see, in Jesus, we see how God understands our pain, and suffering, even betrayal and death. In the same way, God shares the victory over and over again. We celebrate the fact that God’s story is our story. The stuff on earth is the stuff of God.

Recently, I read a Christmas story about 2 small congregations that decided to merge. Their small town was declining, and so were the congregations. The only chance of survival was to get together. So, they formed a merger committee.

Things got complicated, and tensions rose when it came to Christmas. Their traditions were very different.

The biggest problem came with the outdoor nativity display. Both had an elaborate display in the past, and they both were enjoyed by so many. The committee met and met and met again. They chose the best of the stables – one handcrafted by a couple of the members. They chose the figures that seemed to have come through the years in the best shape. But the stalemate came over the baby Jesus. They had 2. Both sides said each “just had to be used.” One was a hand decorated, ceramic figure from the “old country.” The other, a gift of a wealthy member was gold plated, one-of-a-kind, imported from the Holy Land. How would they choose?

The committee gathered around the manger scene, just as the display was put together. The event drew a crowd and several members had gathered – each believing they would choose “their” Christ child. The arguments got rather heated. “Our Christ child is part of our tradition. It has been a part of our celebration for generations. It has to be used!”

“But ours is the finest Christ child money can buy. And it offers a connection with the very land where Christ was born. People expect it. They come from miles around to see it. It has to be used.”

They placed each figure in the manger to see which one looked best. And as they moved to the manger scene, they discovered, one of the children from the families gathered, had climbed into the empty manger and had gone to sleep. Everyone stared at the child – the real child in the manger, for a long time.

Someone said, “I guess we kind of forgot that Christmas is about the gift.”

Perhaps this is why John pays such little attention to the details of Jesus’ birth. He is ultimately more interested in our birth – our new birth as children of God.

Today we celebrate how God has chosen to disclose God’s self in flesh and blood so that we, who are flesh and blood, might recognize ourselves as children of God. By knowing who God is, we know who we are in the heart of God, as well.

We are loved unconditionally, forgiven, unconditionally and treasured unconditionally. This is the gift of Christmas! Thanks be to God! AMEN