

Christmas 2B 03 January 2021
John 1:1-18
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace, peace, and Christmas to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us. Let's pray:

What comes to mind when you think about the Christmas story? Is Christmas over? Is Christmas ever over? What's the work of Christmas?

For most of us, I suspect Christmas means things like shopping, wrapping presents, decorating, cleaning the house, buying groceries and cooking Christmas lunch. It's getting ready for Santa and opening presents. It's getting to church or the computer on time for the start of the Christmas service. I know for some it's a lot of work just getting through these days. They're hard days of grief, sadness, depression. For some the work includes planning the liturgies and preparing sermons. And this year, many hours went into Carols in the Carpark and our Christmas Eve service. We do a lot of work leading up to and in anticipation of Christmas Day.

And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if on Christmas Day, after the child has been born and after the dishes have been done, there's a collective sigh of relief that our Christmas work is done. But what if it's really not? What if that's when "the work of Christmas begins?" What is the real Christmas story?

It's the story St John tells in today's gospel (John 1:1-18) and it's very different from the one we heard St Luke tell on Christmas Day (Luke 2:1-20). One isn't better than the other. They're just different and we need both.

For Luke, it's about Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem, an angel announcing good news to the shepherds, and Jesus lying in the manger. It's a story about thisness: "this day," "this thing that has happened," and "this child."

For John the story is cosmic. It's about the Word becoming flesh, light shining in the darkness, and grace upon grace. It's a creation story, an "In the beginning" story, a story of becoming and the calling forth of life.

Luke holds before us the child, "a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord." John says we have been given "power to become children of God."

Luke tells us what's happening. John tells us what's going on, in what's happening. And I wonder what's going on in Christmas for you? I'm not asking what happened, but what's going on? What Word is becoming flesh in you? What about this power to become children of God? What about the Word becoming flesh in us?

In today's gospel John speaks of becoming or coming into being five times. The Christmas story as told by John isn't just a story of something God caused to happen. It's a story of God calling. It's God calling for the Word to become flesh. It's God insisting that God's Word be given existence in the uniqueness of each of our lives.

Have you ever thought that maybe "the work of Christmas" is what it means and looks like for the Word to become flesh and live among us (John 1:14)?

Maybe the Word becoming flesh and living among us is a momentary kind of thing, happening only in the moments when "the work of Christmas," is being done. Maybe it's less about a particular person and more about a way of being and living with each other.

I think most of us hear about the Word becoming flesh and living among us and we immediately assume it's about Jesus. I don't disagree with that. We see him embodying the Word of God throughout his life; embodying forgiveness, love, mercy, peace, gentleness, nonviolence, wisdom, compassion, generosity. That's his way of being and living. He is our way, our truth, our life.

So, yes, I do think the Word became flesh in Jesus. I just don't think it stops there. The incarnation of God, the embodiment of God in human life, the Word become flesh, is not limited to Jesus. Jesus is the picture, the pattern, the archetype of what the Word become flesh looks like. And we look at that picture so that we can recognise it in ourselves and do something with it.

What about you and me? What about the Word becoming flesh in us?

Maybe the Word can and is intended to become flesh in us too. Maybe that happens every time we offer compassion or mercy, in every moment when we do "the work of Christmas."

Have you ever loved or forgiven someone? Have you ever reached out to someone with compassion or gentleness? Have you ever responded with nonviolence and peace? Have you ever fed the hungry or cared for the sick? Has someone else ever done those things to or for you?

If you answered yes to any one of those questions then you can also say, [once again] "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." Compassion becomes flesh in those who are compassionate. Generosity becomes flesh in those who are generous. Love becomes flesh in those who love. We each embody the Word of God in the particularities and uniqueness of our lives.

- Suppose that's what's going on in what is happening at Christmas.
- Suppose God is calling you and me, asking and waiting for a response.
- Suppose the Word of God can exist, desires to exist, in your and my flesh?

Suppose all that and then look at your life; the people in it, your relationships, and your circumstances. Picture these people's faces. Speak their names. Describe what's happening.

And then tell me this: what's going on in what's happening? What's the compulsion? What Word is calling for existence in your flesh today? What's your Christmas story?

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

It did in Jesus. And I reckon it does in you and in me.

Children of God, there's a Word of God desiring to become flesh in you and me. You know it. You can sense it. Tell me your heart doesn't start racing a little when you contemplate the possibility of the Word made flesh living in you, that you too, are a gift to the world, that you too, tell your own stories of God's grace in Jesus Christ, that you too, bring God's kingdom just that little bit closer to people's lives when you strive daily to lead a holy life, even as Christ has made you holy. That's Christmas, children of God. That's Christmas. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.