

Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas
St. Michael's Episcopal Church
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The Reverend Canon Michael Horvath

How was your Christmas? It is a question I have asked and been asked over the last few days. But in that question, I hear an underlying assumption that Christmas is over. It suggests that Christmas is done and dusted. It is the reason why in at least a few homes the tree has already been taken down, the decorations packed away for another year, and the leftovers thrown out.

We tend to feel the need to move forward and to live our lives from one event to the next, as if there is no life, nothing to learn or discover, nothing to experience on those days. But John today takes a different understanding of Christmas, life, and humanity.

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.

For John, this is the Christmas story, and it is set in the context of creation, "In the beginning." Creation is not an event of the past but the ongoing life of God with his people. This should remind you of the opening of the book of Genesis, "In the beginning God said, 'Let there be...' and there was...." The sky, the air, the ground, the animals, us.

Christmas is God connecting directly to us. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." Christmas is God giving God's own life to his people. It is as if God said, "I want humanity to see my face. I want them to know me intimately." This is God in the flesh, the divine human, holy humanity.

This incarnation is God's celebration of humanity. It is God entrusting God's self to human beings, to you and to me. It is God's reaffirmation of our goodness. It is the sharing and exchanging of life between God and you and me. That's why the early church could say that God became human so that humanity might become God. The Son of God became the son of man so that the sons and daughters of men and women might become children of God. The divine became human, so that we humans can touch the divine.

How's that for a Christmas gift? Imagine what that means for us. It means we are holy and intended to be holy, not as an achievement on our own but as a gift of God. We have been given the power to become children of God. This happens not by blood, or the will of the flesh, or the will of people, but by God.

God sees humanity as the opportunity and the means to reveal himself. But how often do we use our humanity as an excuse, as if we are somehow deficient, only "human"? We fail to see,

to believe, to understand that in the Word becoming flesh and living among us we are God's first sacrament. Human beings are the tangible, outward, and visible signs, and carriers of God's inward and spiritual presence. We are capable of so much good - for love, for compassion, for cooperation to further our care for one another. That's God's creative power, the same one we see in the beginning of Genesis and the beginning of the Gospel of John, that resides within us. We carry that much potential.

In the Jewish tradition that the rabbis tell which describes how each of us has a band of angels marching before us exclaiming "May Way for the Image of God!" Imagine how different our lives and world would be if we lived with this as our reality and the truth that guided our lives.

Everywhere we go the angels go with us announcing the coming of the image of God and reminding us of who we are. That is the truth of Christmas for everyone, our loved ones, and our enemies. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

The implications are profound. It changes how we see ourselves and one another, the way we live, our actions, and our words. It means that Christmas cannot be limited to an event. Christmas is a life to be lived, a way of being. Christmas becomes something we do, rather than something that reeks of impermanence. So maybe we should stop asking, "How was your Christmas?" As one of my clergy colleagues noted, we should be asking, "How are you 'Christmassing?'" Are you recognizing the Word become flesh in your own life? Are you recognizing the Word become flesh in the lives of others?

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us." The Word became flesh and has never ceased living among us. Make way for the image of God that is your very being. Amen.