

Christmas 1: The Word Became Flesh

Two celebrations for the price of one

- Today our readings come from the lectionary of the 1st Sunday after Christmas, but the music is from the Feast of the Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,
 - The Holy Name which is always celebrated on the 1st of January, and will occur on the first Sunday in the year 2023,
 - And for those who care about such things, it is one of three feasts that, when it occurs on a Sunday, take precedence over the usual Sunday readings.
 - We celebrate the holy name of Jesus every day in this church: IHS
 - Iota Eta Sigma - the first three letters of the name, Jesus, in Greek
- Holy Name: comes from Jewish custom that on the 8th Day after a boy was born, he would be circumcised (to become a member of the Jewish people) and given a name
 - In Luke:2 we read that the child was given the name Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb
 - Jesus (Joshua in Hebrew) (*EE-show* in Aramaic)
 - which means Savior or Deliverer

The Questions

- Which leads us to the question: When we think of Jesus as savior or deliverer,
 - We need to consider, “Who is Jesus?”
 - Once we begin to understand that, we must ask ourselves, “What difference does knowing that make?”

The Messiah

- For some, Jesus was the Messiah, but a worldly Messiah,
 - For many he was just another human being
 - One who spoke with authority, a teacher who could go toe-to-toe with the Pharisees, and win

- One who could cure illnesses
- one who might be the ruler ordained by God who would rid Palestine of the Roman occupiers
- but, one, who, at the end of the day, still remained a human being;
 - someone who got hungry, thirsty, tired and irritable.

The Word

- But at the same time, the close followers of Jesus also began to understand him to be fully God
- This understanding of Jesus was not an afterthought of the church after the days of the New Testament, or simply written down at a later church council.
 - The closest followers of Jesus understood that the God of the Universe was uniquely present in Jesus.
 - At Jesus' baptism (as written in Mark 1:11), the voice from Heaven proclaims, "You are my my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."
 - "You are," says Peter in Matthew 16, "the son of the living God."
 - "Truly," says the centurion who looked on at the crucifixion of Jesus, "this man was God's son." (Mark 15:39)
- Somehow this person, Jesus, who was flesh and blood, was the person in whom the God of Israel and the God of the Universe was uniquely present.
 - In John's Gospel, this relationship of God and Jesus could only be expressed in poetry;
 - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (1:1), and "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father's only son, full of grace and truth." (1:14)
- In its simplest retelling, the outline of John's poem is this:
 - Jesus and God are one.
 - Jesus was with God at Creation.
 - Jesus is the source of all life.

- Jesus was not accepted by many people he met, and
 - Jesus makes us God's children.
 - This Gospel reading speaks to the central message of the Christmas season:
 - Jesus came, he was rejected by the very people to whom he was sent.
 - John tells us that the world that Jesus created with the Father did not know him; the Jews did not accept him.
 - But to all who received him, who believed in his name (that in the Word, one knows and sees God), he gave power to become children of God
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Rejected Then, Rejected Now

- It's fairly obvious why the Jews of Jesus' time rejected him.
 - In the minds of the Jews of Jesus time,
 - the life that Jesus led, his message, and his death by crucifixion all led to his rejection by the majority of Jews.
- Jesus was rejected by many of his own people, *then*,
 - and I wonder, "Why does it seem that the world continue to reject him today?"
- It seems that the the Light has come into the darkness, but the Darkness that surrounds the world continues to reject the Light.
 - Because the Light is rejected:
 - Millions of refugees roam the world, victims of war and terrorism and criminal activity
 - Racial hatreds continue in many nations, including our own;
 - Minorities and other people who live on the margins of society can't seem to move the the center
 - Violence overcomes peace in our streets
- All of this happens because the light has been rejected.
 - Where is the good news; where is the comfort and salvation of God?
 - What effect has Christ's message had on the world?

Up to Us

- The answer to all these questions seems to be this: “God expects us to do our part in bringing light into the world.”
 - It is not totally up to us; but we are not allowed to sit on our hands.
 - Our Collect for today points us to the answer:
 - “Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, *may shine forth in our lives*; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.”
 - We are not praying for the Light of God’s incarnate Word to shine forth to the world on its own
 - We are praying that that our lives become the agents by which God’s light will change the world.
 - That we will become the agents of Jesus to bring light into the darkness.
- Jesus brought hope; he brought light so that a people in darkness would never be fearful again.
 - Our challenge is to not let that light disappear.
- St. Teresa of Avila gave us words for our challenge today:
 - “Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks with compassion for the world. Christ has no body on earth but yours.”
- We are the presence of Christ. We are the light, the hope, the bearers of good news.
- What can we do to make sure the light is accepted, that Jesus’ incarnation makes a difference in our world?
 - First of all we must reaffirm for ourselves and others that light of Christ goes in all directions; the light is meant for everyone.
 - Our Prayer Book’s Morning Prayer reminds of this in the Prayer for mission:
 - “Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace.”

- Or as the bumper sticker reads, "God loves you...no exceptions."
 - Another next step in allowing Jesus to make a difference in the world is to insure that we, as individuals and as a society, erect no obstacles that will block the light.
 - We must be fair and work for justice, not only for our own needs but for the entire community.
 - We often reject the light by our inattention to those who need us.
 - We often have a blind eye or a deaf ear the poor in our society.
 - We must disabuse ourselves of the fiction that the poor and homeless are happy living the way that they do...That they live in the conditions that they find themselves because they want to.
 - We have a responsibility to the poor and marginalized:
 - As St. James reminds us "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So the faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (1 James 2:14)
 - Bringing the light of Christ to others is our Christian call; it should be a principle action of our lives.
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Resolutions

- Finally, an infomercial.
 - New Year's Day is upon us. Only two-and-a-half more days to get our New Year's resolutions formed up.
- And as part of our new resolutions, this is always a good time to think about enhancing our relationship with God.
 - In order to share the light, we must first open the door and allow Christ to enter, become one with us, and permeate our lives.
 - In the coming months, we will have additional opportunities to open our doors to Christ as we take up the service of Evening Prayer on Wednesdays at 5:00 PM, starting next week, Wednesday, the 8th of January.

Sunday, December 29, 2019

- In Revelation (5:20) we hear Jesus speaking to the churches: “Listen! I am standing at the door knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”
 - Let us continue to find new ways to welcome the newborn Prince of Peace
 - Let us allow the miracle of the Word becoming Flesh to change us forever.