

Christmas  
December 25, 2007  
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How strange it is this holy day. The rest of the world had declared Christmas over and the church has just begun to celebrate. Even for us the candle lit services and anticipation are over. The greenery is still up and the decorations are still gleaming. But honestly, we are back to life as normal.

Yet, neither "out there" nor "in here" are things the same. In the world outside the winter solstice has come and gone, meaning the nights will slowly become shorter. Dawn will creep over our window sill just a bit earlier each day. Soon will come the day when we arrive at work long after sun up.

In here today marks a solstice of our own as we celebrate the birth of Christ. The Son of Righteousness has come among us to bring an end to the night of fear and sin that has haunted the human race since the very beginning. We have seen his glow by the light of a lantern in a stable in Bethlehem. Yet it seems we are not clear about what has arrived in the baby size package so long ago.

John the Gospel writer in the poetic beginning to his gospel in the simplest of words reminds us who this is.

It is God's own self as Son and Word incarnate.

Word of God, what does John mean to convey to us? For one thing, think about the power of words. Ancient people knew words could create or kill. Some African peoples believe that it is important to keep their children's beautiful given names private. They never speak the child's name so the evil spirits can never steal the child from them.

Children tease each other unmercifully by calling each other names. Words have power. That is one reason there is such an interest in language that is more inclusive. It reminds us that God's love knows no categories: no race, sexual orientation or gender. That is a good thing for all of us to remember. Those of us who have been labeled and those fortunate to have never been labeled are all God's children.

But John is talking about the creative word and not the destructive word. John is talking about the word spoken over the chaos. It is that Word spoken that creates the world we enjoy. It is that Word spoken that gives us life and breath. Without that Word, John reminds us, nothing would be as it is.

That is the Word made flesh that we celebrate at Christmas. That is the Word shining in a tiny baby called Jesus. John does not play around with words. He writes what he means, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God..... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory."

That is who Mary's child is. That is what we have come to celebrate.

Perhaps the incarnation of Christ is so unimaginable that we cannot take it in. If Mary's cousin Elizabeth exclaimed on seeing her, "Who am I that the mother of the Lord should come to me?" How much more awed would we be if we really understood Christmas celebrates the fact that our Lord and God is here. God is present with us, made known to us, a living reality.

It is amazing that we dare to be so casual about this holy day. Our hearts and minds have to be touched if we are ever able to grasp just a glimpse of the enormity of the Incarnation. What would we do if the realization of the truth this holy day celebrates were to clearly dawn upon us?

Perhaps we would fall down on our knees right there in the Galleria Mall. Perhaps we would begin to pay more attention to our relationships in a way that would not just change our world but the world of all who come in contact with us. Perhaps we would find the power to let go of our fears and live as a child of the light.

One of the titles for Jesus is Emmanuel meaning "God with us." Right here, right now, in this place, in line at the store, in the office, on the street, in houses and cardboard shelters. God is present with those on the battlefield and those at the peace table. God is with those in the hospital, those in a nursing home, those working in a laboratory or medical research center. God has never been anywhere else. God is with us.

Now in Jesus we can see and touch. We can know that God loves us enough to give all for our sake. It is up to us to remember. It is up to us to treat that memory with respect. Christmas is disappearing from the shop windows

but it is just beginning in our hearts.