

Sermon for Christmas Day & Eve - 2008

By Tim Ljunggren

Be honest—how many of you get stressed out by Christmas?

We've come to that moment in our Church year that's fraught with too much sentimentality and not enough compassion. We've come to that evening (day) in our Church year where the voices of angels and archangels are in competition with the half-off (or more) sales at Target, Sears, Neiman Marcus, and other assorted fine retail establishments. We've come to that moment in our Church year when—just when we're able to peer into that manger and see the face of God in the form of a helpless and hapless human child—we pull back long enough to ruin the moment by remembering that tax season is just around the corner, and that we need to get all of our receipts in order before next Wednesday.

God help us. God help us everyone.

In this time of high anxiety—by the way, how's your IRA doing?—we come together this evening to celebrate the birth of Christ, the birth of the Messiah, the Son of God, Emmanuel, the Holy One. Yet, sometimes we forget, don't we? Sometimes we forget what this celebration is all about. We're too busy shopping, cooking, cleaning, worrying—we're too busy being human.

This celebration of Christ coming into the world has nothing to do with the great deals we found on iPods or Blueberrys. It has nothing to do with office parties, Aunt Martha's yearly visit where we tremble and quake of the thought of her staying with us for *five days in a row*, or the simple fact that we're too stressed out to enjoy any of this.

This celebration—the one that we're gathered here together for this evening (today)—is one where we're reminded of the frailty of human flesh and its utter dependence on other human flesh to nourish it, to keep it alive, to allow it to become something that God intended it to become.

This celebration—the one that we're gathered here together for this evening (today)—is one that serves as a wakeup call to us all; that, through human flesh, God chose to enter the world and become one of us. Through that human flesh,

God—born into a cold and lightless world that knew God not—became something utterly brilliant and transformative.

God helped us. God helped us everyone.

God—the Holy One and the Wholly (as in complete) One—who somehow managed to be in two places at once, was the ultimate quantum physicist, the One who actually turned our notion of “reality” on its head again and again and again. Does anyone here know anything about superposition in quantum theory? I don’t either, but look it up anyway: physicists are now learning what God has worked all along—that matter and essence and presence can be in two places at the same time.

Wow. That means that Aunt Martha can be in two places at the same time. How scary is that?

Our celebration tonight is simply the recognition of this—that God, the Mysterious One, the One beyond our human understanding, came into the world to be with—us! That God, the Mysterious One, the One beyond our human understanding, not only took on our flesh, but took on our humanity as well.

Look into that crèche—what do you see?

A baby. An infant, just like any other girl or boy born into the world. Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. Flesh to flesh. Just as I mentioned last Sunday, it’s all holy, isn’t it? Every bit of it—God made us in God’s image so that we can become co-creators with God. To do that, we must first recognize that our flesh—through the flesh of Christ—becomes a vehicle for God’s grace and love in the world...

And that’s the true meaning of Christmas, isn’t it?

Yes, of course—Christmas is all about Christ coming into the world—but you know what? It’s all about *us* coming into the world as well; it’s about *us* recognizing our *own* gifts of holiness, grace, love, and compassion—gifts that we must share with others.

Oh, I know. Sometimes we’re too busy to be compassionate. Sometimes we’re too busy to buy into our own holiness. Sometimes we choose to ignore the grace

and the love we possess, simply because it's so much easier to keep those for ourselves.

Peer into that crèche—what do you see?

Pure life. Pure love. Pure compassion. Pure grace. Pure holiness. Every bit of which was used up and replenished and given to us again and again and again.

Because God *so loved* the world, that God became one of us...so that we may be gifted to carry on the work of God in our world.

What better gift to give?

Merry Christmas...

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