

Homily

Second Sunday of Christmastide (2 January 2022)

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Every year, on the Feast of Christmas, we recall the moment about 2,000 years ago when one particular baby was born to entirely unremarkable parents. Mary and Joseph were not wealthy, they were socially suspect for having a child before they were married; it was even rumoured that Joseph was not the true father. In a city not their own, without family to stay with or even purchased lodging, the baby was born in a stable or cave, depending on your tradition, and it took the intervention of angels for anyone other than the oxen and asses standing nearby to pay the moment any notice. This unfortunate and unremarkable scene—sounding rather like the opening of a novel where Charles Dickens took a stab at historical fiction set in ancient western Asia—is the place where God chose to first dwell in humanity.

God's choice to take on human flesh and live among us was such a profoundly unexpected, unprecedented one that Saint John feels it necessary to lay this out in a carefully layered introduction to his telling of the Gospel. John goes to pains to remind us that the Eternal Word who comes into the world at Christmas, the light that reveals truth and divine glory, is the same Eternal Word and Holy Wisdom that was present at the creation of all things. Jesus Christ is not an especially clever man, nor a miracle-working prophet, nor an especially holy rabbi. Jesus Christ, the adorable baby in the manger in so many nativity scenes, is the Eternal Word spoken by the Source of all being since before the beginning of time, living among us in human flesh. The God whose touch causes mountains to melt and whose breath causes the seas to rage is a tiny baby, suckling at his mother's breast and grabbing at his adoptive father's little finger.

This divine choice, to take on human flesh and live with us in fully human stature, is one God makes in cooperation with humanity. Just a few weeks ago in Advent we recalled and discussed the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, inviting her to participate in God's plan. Just as the baby Mary will bear is the same God present in creation, God's desire to cooperate with humanity has been present since the very beginning. When God created humanity, one of their first interactions was cooperation in naming all of the animals in creation. (Genesis 2.19) God's love for all of creation is so great, but humanity holds a special place in God's heart. The psalmist reminds us of this with crystal clarity:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour. (Psalm 8.3-5)

Throughout the history of our faith and humanity's relationship with God, we see again and again God extending wisdom, care, protection, and teaching meant to help us live in the glory and

honour God intends for us. We also see again and again that humanity turns away from God and Holy Wisdom. We look to ourselves for wisdom that we do not have. We set aside God's teaching in favour of close-but-not-quite values of our own invention that are a little easier, a little tastier, a little sexier, a little more comfortable, always looking to make things a little better for ourselves, but almost always at the expense of another. We follow the desires of ourselves without the temperance of God's wisdom and we pay the price with the health, welfare, and blood of our neighbours. We sin, against ourselves, against one another, and against God.

In spite of this long-established pattern of humanity accepting God's gifts and promptly forgetting the teaching, obligation, and responsibility that came with them, God remains with us. Each time that we realize we have fallen back into those familiar, tempting, harmful patterns and repent and seek to return to God, we find God waiting for us. Not waiting for us wherever we last recall meeting God, but instead waiting right beside us, ready to extend the hand of health, blessing, cooperation, and companionship once again. God is always with us, leaving no one behind.

In the Incarnation, when Holy Wisdom inhabited human flesh and shared our hopes, dreams, joys, sorrows, struggles, and triumphs, God made the choice to include humanity not only through hospitality, like guests in the divine home, but as precious children adopted into the divine family. In Jesus Christ humanity and divinity are held in the same person and our humanity is forever joined to God's divinity. God's desire to care and show love for creation extends to sharing our lives, even in the most unlikely, unremarkable circumstances. Born to unwed parents of no standing and little means.

As John tells us, the light that came into the world on Christmas came to enlighten everyone. Not only the rich or powerful, but everyone. Poor folk and humble, the meek, the lowly, those barely making ends meet, and all of these alongside those who live in halls of power and wealth. God desires a relationship of loving cooperation with us and desires that we treat one another in the same way, always companions on the road, leaving no one behind.

This Christmastide, as we recall the astonishing lengths to which God has gone for us, may we find ourselves ever more willing to go to the same lengths for one another, for all of God's children. Amen.