

God with Skin

Christmas Day sermon: St. Peter's Cathedral, Helen, Montana. December 25, 2017 @ 10:00 am

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Good morning! And a Blessed Christmas to all of you.

On behalf of our Bishop, Frank Brookhart and his wife Susan, who is also our organist, the cathedral staff, Sara Medley our senior warden and all of the members of the Cathedral Chapter, I welcome you to this beautiful cathedral. We also want to thank the lay readers, acolytes, choir, eucharistic ministers, ushers and altar guild for all of the preparations throughout the Advent season which serve to make this celebration so glorious. As many of you know, I am the interim dean and it is likely that this will be the one Christmas my wife Sherry and I celebrate here. We are very grateful for the warm welcome we have received, for the kindness you have shown us and for your deep faith.

On this Christmas morning we heard the opening verses of the Gospel of John. We call this the 'Prologue' and some have referred to this in organ music terms as the Prelude followed by the Fugue. The Prelude introduces all of the themes of the Gospel of John and throughout the rest of the Gospel, these themes are developed.

I want to focus on three of those themes. First, that God was made flesh, second, that the word was rejected and third, that many received Jesus.

The Prologue begins, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. It ends with the proclamation that "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

We call this holy day of Christmas, "The Feast of the Incarnation" which for some, is a complicated title that may be confusing. But I was once helped to understand the meaning of this fancy word 'incarnation' in a simpler way. A story is told about the 6 year old girl who was trying to understand the meaning of Christmas and Jesus. Her mother was trying to explain to her about Jesus coming to earth, not only as God but as a human being. The daughter was being very attentive, trying to figure this out, when all of a sudden a smile came over her face, her eyes lit up and she said, 'I think I understand!

JESUS IS GOD WITH SKIN!

I think that is about as good an explanation of the 'incarnation' as I have ever heard. Yes, Jesus is God with skin! The Word made flesh is God with skin.

I think you could take this definition a bit further by saying that the reason God sent Jesus in the flesh is because he wanted to have 'skin in the game'! God was dissatisfied with loving his people from a distance. God was dissatisfied with playing safe in heaven, protected from the sins of humanity. God did not want to simply communicate from afar or through intermediaries like the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. He wanted to live with us face to face. God wanted 'Face time'. Jesus was God's 'face time' with the creation he made.

So this holy day of Jesus' incarnation is all about 'God with Skin'.

Another theme from the Gospel of John is that the person of Jesus comes into the world he had made and is rejected. "He came into the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not.

He came unto his own and his own received him not. But for as many as received him to them gave he power to become the children of God.”

The people Jesus met had two reactions. Some accepted him as the Messiah and others rejected him. The whole Gospel of John is divided along those lines. It tells about different ways Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God and people either accept him or reject him.

I think of a brief but powerful poem by Madeleine L’Engle, which speaks of the political atmosphere surrounding Jesus’ arrival. She calls her poem, “The Risk of Birth”.

That was no time for a child to be born  
With the earth betrayed by war and hate.  
And a comet slashing the sky to warn  
That time runs out and the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born  
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome  
Honor and truth were trampled by scorn  
Yet did the Savior make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?  
The inn is full of the planet earth  
And by a comet the sky is torn.  
Yet love still takes the risk of birth.

Yes..... in Jesus, God took the risk of birth. God did not wait for a time when his love would be received without rejection. God did not wait for a time when everyone would believe him or receive him. He came after us, when we all thought we had better things to do. God would not be indifferent or callous to a humanity which rejected him. Instead, he showed up to do whatever was necessary to forgive whatever stood in the way of a close, loving relationship and to repair whatever was broken.

God did that because he could do nothing less. God is love. God is love and God cannot deny who he is, keep at a safe distance and leave us alone. In Jesus, God came to his world himself. There were no substitutes. Just himself. God showed up, face to face and put his skin in the game.

Many believed in Jesus and received him. And their lives were changed forever. Many accepted him. Jesus came to show us forgiveness as the way to heal broken relationships. He taught us that

relationships are more important than things, that life is about relationships, our relationship to God and our relationships with one another. Jesus taught us that love is what makes our relationships flourish. Jesus came to us because he believed in us and invited us to believe in him.

I finish with a favorite story, I heard a Roman Catholic deacon preach while on vacation recently, which summarizes what I am trying to say. The story was about a man who was madly in love with a certain woman. He was mad in love with her, but she rejected him. She simply wanted nothing to do with him, told him so and thought that was the end of the relationship.

But for the man, it was not the end of the relationship. He kept going after her, writing letters, letters which were never answered.

At one point she moved away from their town, but somehow, the man found her address and continued to write to her. Still the letters went unanswered. But he kept writing.

Finally, he decided he would go after her by journeying to her distant town, toward her new address. He worked up this plan of how he would finally go and knock on her door, hoping this would do the trick. He got to the town and just before he called on her, he thought he had better check to see whether she was married or not. So he went to the Post Office to inquire.

The person at the counter knew the woman. Then he told him that recently, she had married. She married the mailman!

You see, the mailman showed up. The lover loved from a distance and mailed it in. Like Jesus, the mailman showed up!

The God, the God who came to earth in Jesus, the God with skin, has shown up. This God who was a human person has shown us who God is and what he is like.

On this day, may we make room in our hearts to receive him again. May this Jesus be invited to grow in us. And may the Spirit of Jesus, which has been planted in our souls since baptism, have its way with us. Amen