

Meeting God Through Christ

John 1:14

December 25, 2007

I.

Merry Christmas! That's sounds familiar this time of year, isn't it? There's another phrase in the Bible that also should be familiar to us.

Two books in the Bible open with the words "In the beginning." They are the very first words in the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis, and also the first words in last Gospel in the New Testament, John, which we heard today. And both books treat the beginning as something beyond this world, something beyond time and space as we understand it.

We all know that the beginning in the Book of Genesis describes the creation of the universe. John's Gospel, however, starts even before creation. He viewed the beginning as eternity in the past. Just as eternity can reach indefinitely forward, it also can stretch endlessly back.

John stepped outside of time and space and told us that God has existed eternally, and that the Word also has existed eternally with God. He then moved into our time and space, and explained how this eternal Word came into the world through Jesus Christ, who was both fully human and fully divine.

This means that, according to John, the powerful and sovereign God who was universally revealed to all people in the Book of Genesis is the very same loving and merciful God who has been revealed to us now in Jesus Christ. We look at Christ and we see God.

II.

Let me read just the first three verses of today's reading again, along with verse fourteen. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."

What a lyrical and mystical statement! At first glance it might be easy to dismiss this passage as philosophical or abstract. We might think that it does not speak to us as some parts of the Bible do.

I would like to suggest just the opposite. John's Gospel tells about the greatest drama ever to happen—God coming to earth. And John's version is not just the usual Christmas story with which we all are familiar, it also adds meaning and significance to that Christmas story because John explains exactly who that baby in the manger was.

The traditional story tells us that Jesus was born of Mary to be the savior of the world. And that part of the story treats the little baby in the manger as fully human. He had all the same characteristics as any other baby. He burped, and cried, and did all the other things little babies do.

Then John's Gospel takes it further and proclaims that this fully human baby also was fully God because he was incarnate from the Word as the earthly expression of God. Jesus was the way in which God actually revealed himself and his character to us.

I once heard a well-known preacher say that if God wanted to communicate with cows, Jesus would have been a cow. If God wanted to communicate with birds, Jesus would have been a bird. But God wanted to communicate with us, and so he sent his son to us as a human being.

This means that in Christ we meet God as God wants us to know him. Jesus brought us face to face with God, not in some cosmic and eternal sense, even though the Word is cosmic and eternal, but rather by making evident God's divine love that is expressed so fully in the Christmas story.

III.

That aspect of Jesus and his revelation of God is a central part of the Gospel reading for today. It describes Jesus is this way: "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

What is the purpose of a light? Normally we don't have lights just so we can sit and look at them. Our Christmas trees might be an exception. But typically we have lights to illuminate the things around us. We have lights so that we can see other things more clearly.

Jesus was the light in two ways. Because he was both God and man, he was both the divine light and the worldly light. As the divine light he revealed God more clearly. In this way he showed us who God is, how God feels, and how God loves us. Jesus could do this because he was divine himself.

But as the worldly light he shined in the other direction. He represented us to God. Through his life here God could experience how we think, how we feel, and how we long for love. Jesus could do this because he was human and knew us intimately.

John also tells us that the Prince of Peace was born into a time that also was home to the Prince of Darkness, and yet the darkness was not able to overcome him. This earthly conflict between good and evil clearly is set forth in today's reading: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him."

Aren't those just about the most tragic and sad words in the Bible? God himself came to earth to reveal himself in love to his people, and they turned their backs on him.

But John also offers hope, for those tragic and sad words of rejection are immediately followed by words of salvation. John proclaimed that "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

That applies to us. We are given the opportunity, through Christ's revelation of God, to share in the heavenly kingdom that is God's promise to those who believe. But faith does not impose itself. It exists among alternatives. God came to offer a relationship, but he makes it our choice.

IV.

Christmas is not really over; it never is. Christmas is God's promise of a great new day. John tells us that light and truth win out, and that the darkness cannot prevail. But this is a message we must hear with the ears of faith. God wants us to believe in him the way that he believes in us, because he came to us so that we might come to him. *Amen.*