

The Revelation Of God

John 1:1-14

December 25, 2011

I.

I hope you all are having a Merry Christmas, and are looking forward to the rest of the holidays. It has been a busy and fulfilling time here at St. Thomas. Beginning with last Sunday, we will have celebrated eight Eucharists, including our service at Woodland Village.

This day comes whether we are ready or not, doesn't it? We're starting to unwind and breath a sigh of relief. The heavy lifting probably is done.

But as we conclude our plans to make this a memorable Christmas, let us remember that we never can top the first one. This illustrates the difference between two ways of understanding Christmas. One is the worldly setting of shopping, and decorating, and parties, and all of the other activities that we plan and put on our schedules.

But the other is something we cannot plan or schedule because it's always there. God's love for all humanity was made known through Jesus Christ, and has endured without interruption since that momentous event we celebrate today. We either accept it or ignore it, but we cannot schedule it, or decorate it, or manage it to suit our purposes.

And certainly we can enjoy the excitement of the worldly part of Christmas so long as it does not diminish the priority of the spiritual part. But it can be challenging to continue in the eternal truth of God's love if we are caught up in the immediacy of temporal things.

This reminds me of the story of the fellow who was pondering the differences between what is enduring and what is passing. So he visited a friend who was an amateur philosopher as well as a professional music teacher. He walked in his friend's office, and in a somewhat offhand way said, "So, professor, what's the good news for today."

The music teacher did not say a word. Instead he picked up a tuning fork, struck it with a mallet, and produced a tone. Then the teacher said, "The good news is that was middle C, it was middle C yesterday, it will be middle C tomorrow and next year, and in fact it will be middle C forever. And that's the good news."

II.

The same kind of good news is in the reading from John this morning. It was the good news yesterday, and will be so tomorrow, next year, and forever.

Let me read just the first three verses 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! But it might be easy to dismiss this passage as abstract or philosophical. We might think 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 of the greatest drama ever to happen—God coming to earth. And John's version is not the usual Christmas story with which we are familiar, it also explains exactly who that baby in the manger was.

For example, the traditional account in the other Gospels emphasizes the human side of Jesus' birth. We are familiar with these Christmas stories in the Gospels and Matthew and Luke. We can

imagine them. We see them on Christmas cards. There are pictures of shepherds, the manger, and the star of Bethlehem. Most of our Christmas carols are based on Matthew or Luke.

John's Gospel, however, is harder to visualize. Christmas cards usually don't reflect this more cosmic aspect of the Christmas story. Nevertheless, it reminds us that this fully human baby also was fully God. He was eternally divine in heaven before he became also human on earth.

A well-known preacher once said if God wanted to communicate with cows, Jesus would have been a cow. And 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 be with us as a human being.

Now, I personally think that if God wants to communicate with cows or birds, he can do it. After all, he created them. But that preacher's example makes a useful point.

And the point is that in Christ we meet God as God wants us to know him. Jesus brought us face to face with God, not in some distant or abstract sense, but in a personal sense that shows us God's divine love. Jesus showed us what God is like.

III.

And in addition to telling us who Jesus was, today's Gospel also spoke of what his birth meant. It said that "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."

What did John mean by darkness? Certainly it was something more than the absence of light. At some times the absence of light can be good, and not something to be overcome. Our natural cycle of day and night is part of creation. Darkness is not always bad.

As a result, darkness in this case means more than the absence of something. It refers to a thing that has its own existence; its own reality. And that thing is the work of evil in the world that produces sin in our lives. Jesus was the Prince of Peace born into a world that also is home to the Prince of Darkness. And the light of Jesus overcame those dark works of evil.

Jesus also was the light in two other 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. He showed us who God is and how God loves us. Jesus could do this because he was divine and knew God intimately.

But as the worldly light he shined on us and called us to love each other. That light shows us how to live in Christian faith in the world. Jesus also could do this because he was human and knew us intimately.

IV.

Today's reading challenges us to reaffirm our faith in Jesus Christ. If we think he was only a man, or a great teacher or a prophet, then we might as well forget about him. There will be nothing there to help us when we need it, and as only a man he could not offer us salvation.

But if he is God, as he claimed to be and as John told us today, then we are called to yield our lives to him. We are called to worship and serve him, and live as he taught us, secure in our Christian hope of eternal life. God wants us to believe in him in the way that he believes in us, because he came to us so that we might come to him. *Amen.*