

### **When God became one of us**

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the First Sunday after Christmas Day, December 31, 2017.

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:14 (KJV)

Saint John the Evangelist who is the author of today's gospel is the youngest of the twelve apostles. He and his brother James make their living as fishermen. When Jesus calls the fishermen to follow him, they leave their nets to become fishers of people. They, along with Andrew and Peter, become part of the inner circle of disciples closest to Jesus. John is referred to as the beloved disciple because of his close relationship to Jesus throughout his ministry. At the crucifixion, after all the others flee in fear, John remains at the foot of the cross and assumes the care of the mother of Jesus.

John writes in a highly symbolic and interpretive style. The eagle is his symbol because he writes with the lofty vision of an eagle in flight. His gospel account of the birth of Christ differs from those of Matthew and Luke. There is no mention of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem with Joseph and Mary and the Christ child, the shepherds and Wise Men. John's version of the Nativity refers to the birth of Christ only as the light coming into the darkness of the world. Jesus lights the way in a world of confusion and chaos and the light is not overcome by the darkness. Our finite minds comprehend only that which has a beginning and an end and it is difficult for us to understand the nature of the infinite God who has no beginning and no end. John's description of the birth of Christ emphasizes God's creative origins and self-revelation by taking on human form. The more we know Christ, the more we know God personally.

The imagery in the prologue to Saint John's gospel expresses the mystery of God taking human form in the person and life of Christ Jesus. The narrative in John's gospel opens the same as the story of creation in the book of Genesis: In the beginning... John writes, In the beginning was the Word. The Word of God refers to the mind of God. The Greek for word is logos and appears in our own language as prologue, dialogue, catalogue, and monologue. The Logos or Word of God is the principle force of creation. The Word became flesh when God took the initiative to enter human history in the person of Christ. The Word is therefore the complete expression of the nature of God.

The lyricism of the prologue to John's gospel is both beautiful and at the same time perplexing. It tells us that before the world was created, the mind and wisdom of God already existed. It is through God's mind and will that all things are created and given life. God took on human form to live among us in Christ who embodies the qualities of God's compassionate nature, full of grace and truth.

The light Christ reveals much about the human condition that is difficult for us to understand. There are mysterious aspects of human existence that lie deep within us. While there are some parts of our personality that are obvious to us and everyone else, there are other areas of which we are unaware that are perceived by others. There are further aspects of our lives that only we know. Finally, there are those areas that are a mystery known only to God. Christ sheds light on the mysterious and hidden parts of our personality that enable us to gain a perspective on who and what we really are.

It is in being part of the Christian community that we are freed from being victims of our faults and weaknesses that lead us to being our own worst enemy. It stands to reason that when we get beyond being absorbed in our own selves, we are better able to focus on those of others. To see Christ in other people enables us to be more open to a better understanding of our place in relationship to the rest of humanity.

There are those for some this holiday season is a difficult time. The shorter days and longer nights contribute to depression. Though it is perfectly understandable, we can never recreate the sense of joy and excitement about this Christmas season that we may have known as children. As we mature, Christmas is experienced in different ways with a more profound meaning.

No one knows for sure when Christ was born. December 25th was chosen at the time of the winter solstice as the dawn begins to appear earlier and the daylight lasts longer.

Now that our Christmas presents have been opened, the stores are jammed with people returning gifts that are the wrong size, the wrong color or the wrong style. As you put away your Christmas decorations, remember that Christ is the gift that is always right for bringing out the best in us. If you are going to make any new year's resolutions, resolve to be the best example you can be of wholeness and integrity.

The fully human Jesus is a radical, non-violent revolutionary who embraces lepers and forgives prostitutes, adulterers, tax collectors and thieves. He is not a white American, did not speak English, and lived in a land occupied by a foreign government. He does not accuse the poor of being lazy. He is against tax systems that benefit the wealthy. He says nothing about homosexuality, abortion or birth control. He upholds gender equality by respecting women and men on the same basis. He promotes health and wellness in mind, body and spirit. He advocates for the poor by being a voice for the voiceless. He strives for justice and peace among all people, and upholds the dignity of all people without regard to wealth or status. He encourages us to love God and to love and respect other people as we love and respect ourselves. God's grace working in us enables us to love those we don't like. This itinerate prophet and teacher in the rabbinic tradition continues to alter the course of human history. Think about that.