

Being the Incarnate Body of Christ

It was a typical, ordinary event for every family, but it was an event that carried some deep significance. Paul and Judy, young couple with a four year old and a two year old were fast asleep when David, their four year old, decided to climb in bed with them. Judy woke up, realized what was happening and was determined to break him of this habit.

“What’s the matter, David?”

“There are monsters in my room. I want to sleep here.”

“No, that’s not a good idea,” Judy said.

She took David back to his room, put on the light and tried to reassure him with these words, “You need not be afraid. God is in this room with you.”

The child replied, “I know that God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin.”

Right here we have a seed of the reason for Christmas, the reason for the Incarnation. God has taken on flesh, because, like David, we all need someone who has some skin. We are human beings, not angels without bodies. We receive knowledge and communicate through our five senses. We are present in the world and the world is present to us in that which we sense.

The Almighty God created our nature. He respects how it operates. He deals with us through our senses. He became one of us, took on our flesh, so he could be seen, touched and heard. He became one of us because we need a God with some skin.

We call the mystery we are celebrating this evening the Incarnation of the Lord. The term incarnation might sound quite lofty, but it is extremely earthly. It means to possess physical flesh. Like the related words, carnal or carnivorous, it speaks about the body as raw, physical, tangible. Jesus became one of us, took on flesh, became Incarnate. Why? Because God loves us so much and because we need him so much.

John Shea tells the wonderful story of five year old Sharon’s rendition of the Christmas story. It goes something like this:

She was five and sure of the facts, and recited them with slow solemnity, convinced that every word was revelation.

She said, “they were so poor, they only had one peanut butter and jelly sandwich to eat, and they went a long way from home, without getting lost.

The lady rode on a donkey and the man walked, and the baby was inside the lady.

They had to stay in a stable with an ox and an ass (hee-hee), but the three Rich Men found them because a star lifted the roof.

Shepherds came and you could pet the sheep but not feed them.

Then the baby was borned. And do you know who it was? With that her quarter eyes inflated to silver dollars. She said, "The baby was God."

And then Sharon jumped into the air, whirled around, dove into the sofa and buried her head under the cushion, which is the only proper response to the Good news of the Incarnation.

How much does God love us? He loves us so much that he became one of us, Jesus the Christ, our Savior.

But the Great Gift of Christmas did not end with that one event. Jesus was born for us; He died for us; He rose to the Father and gave us his life, he gave us his Spirit. And then the greatest part of the Christmas miracle: He remains with us forever.

Sometimes, we are guilty of relegating the Christmas miracle to a story buried in the past, two thousand years ago. But the reality has its impact in the present as well as in the past. The Incarnation was not a thirty-three year experiment by God in history, a one-shot physical occurrence. The Incarnation began with Jesus and has never stopped. God's physical body is still present. He still has skin, human skin, and he still walks the world as Jesus did.

We are the Body of Christ. Scripture and St. Paul in particular, never say that we replace Christ's Body or that we represent Christ's Body, St. Paul says, we are the Body of Christ. God is still here, in the flesh. He continues to dwell among us. He maintains physical skin in two manners, in the body of believers and in the Eucharist, in communion. When we receive communion we receive the Body of Christ, the spiritual become physical, the gift of Christmas.

Do you realize the tremendous implications this has in our lives? If we are the Body of Christ, gifted with the Eucharist to sustain us, then God's presence in the world depends to a great deal upon us. There is a beautiful poem attributed to St. Theresa of Avila. You have heard it, I'm sure:

Christ has no body now, but yours.

No hands, but yours,

No feet, but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world.

Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.

We, the Body of Christ, proclaim the Word that Jesus spoke. We, the Body of Christ, render his presence real in our world. We, the Body of Christ, unite mankind to the Love of God.

A practical implication of all this: On this the central family day of the year, many are hurting because a son or daughter or other dear relative has strayed away from God. How do you, how do we deal with this? How do we deal with those around us who are quite vocal in their avoidance of all things religious, all things spiritual, even, perhaps, all things moral? How do you, do we, care for that Loved One who is hurting inside while running away from the Lord?

We care for them by being loving and forgiving. We care for them by radiating our presence in Body of Christ. That way the Body of Christ can touch them. The Body of Christ can heal them. We love them because Christ loves them. And we love them because their contact with us is their principal contact with Christ.

A woman touched the hem of Jesus's garment and was cured. Jesus said that he felt his power rushing through him. An estranged loved one is touched by us and the healing power of Christ can flow through us.

On this day of Love Become Flesh, of Word become Flesh, we are challenged to keep Christmas alive 365 days a year. To participate in this mystery throughout our lives we have to remember: We can never stop loving. We can never stop forgiving. We do not have the right as Christians to prevent Christ from being present in the world, especially in our own personal worlds.

Our loved ones need to experience God's presence in we who are the Body of Christ. Our loved ones need a God who has skin. And we need a God who has skin. We need Jesus Christ.

May the Grace and Peace of our Incarnate God, the presence of Jesus Christ as one of Us, flow through your lives and my life. May the world witness the Birth of Lord in the joy and celebration, the love and forgiveness of those whose lives continue his life. And may Jesus Christ remain the central reality of our lives.