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January 1st, 2023

Scripture: John 1: 1-5

Sermon Title: In the Beginning was the Word

Prayer...

Introduction:

Christmastide lasts from Christmas day until Epiphany Sunday in the church calendar. Next week we will celebrate Epiphany-the story of the Magi visiting Jesus. Christmastide is a time for us to savor the birth of Jesus and the message of the incarnation.

We are to remember that God became one of us in the birth of his Son Jesus. God became a vulnerable baby to show us God's love revealed in human form. Love came down to earth and took on flesh to show us love.

Yes, the Christmas message is that God loves the world and became one of us to show us that we are deeply loved. The beauty of the incarnation, God becoming a human being in Jesus is also a wonderful

focus as we begin a new year and remember that in the birth of Jesus is the sign of new life and a new beginning always available to us as we follow Jesus and walk by his light and love.

I chose John 1: 1-5 for our passage today because this is the text that the Gospel writer John uses to begin the story of Jesus. We are reminded in this text that before Jesus was born, he existed as the Word of God. Before Jesus became the Son of God in human flesh, Christ existed as part of the Trinity and was present at the beginning of the creation of the world. The Scripture says that all things came into being through him, and that in him was life and the life in Him was the light of all people. Then John states that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. What a powerful declaration of the power of the light and love found in Jesus.

John 1:14 describes the incarnation of Jesus. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." A few verses later John says,

“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” Friends, the Scripture teaches us that in Jesus we see God.

It makes sense that for God to be revealed to the world that God would need to become one of us.

Recently a friend of mine gave me a quote from Mother Teresa about the incarnation of Jesus.

Mother Teresa said this,

“I don’t think we could have ever loved God if Jesus had not become one of us. So that we might be able to love God, he became one of us in all things, except sin. If we have been created in the image of God, then we have been created to love, because God is love. In his passion Jesus taught us how to forgive out of love, how to forget out of humility. Find Jesus, and you will find peace.”

The first part of this quote from Mother Teresa is quite interesting for us to ponder. She suggests that God had to become a human being in Jesus for us to be able to love God.

How do you feel about this statement? For me personally, I would definitely say that since I was a child I have been a big fan of Jesus. I have loved Jesus for as long as I can remember. This is partly because I grew up as a proud Evangelical Christian. Before the term evangelical became politicized, I was raised with a strong love of being evangelical. I loved that I was taught as a child to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. My faith has expanded from my earlier days and the word evangelical feels very loaded to me now, but I still love Jesus.

Sometimes I spend time with Christians who identify as more progressive and, in those circles, I have heard people at times make fun of evangelical types for talking about “me and Jesus.” The idea is that me and Jesus Christians are super spiritual and forget about social

justice because they are so concerned about a buddy relationship with Jesus and converting people.

Well, for my progressive friends who I normally relate to in some ways, I sometimes find myself getting a little defensive about my personal relationship with Jesus. The evangelical in me raises up and says, Oh I get your point about social justice I really do, but “Oh How I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus, Oh I love Jesus because he first loved me.” Or I might find myself singing in my heart, “What a beautiful name it is, what a beautiful name it is, the name of Jesus Christ my king.”

I guess I kind of like Mother Teresa’s point. Our Savior Jesus Christ reveals to us God’s love in human form. I don’t think my relationship with God would be as close as it is, without Jesus.

And here’s the catch. We can know what God is like because our Scripture teaches us that God the Word became flesh. Jesus is God in the flesh and we can trust that God is love not only because the Bible

says God is love but because when Jesus was on earth he showed us what God is like by loving people so well.

God became one of us. Emmanuel means God is with us. God became a vulnerable baby and Jesus grew up and experienced what humans experience.

Now this is the fun part. Let us think about the humanity of Jesus for a bit. I like to think that Jesus was a normal precocious kid. He liked playing with puppies and teasing his brothers and sisters. He probably did not like eating cottage cheese or maybe he fed his liver and onions to the family dog when his parents weren't looking. As a teenager, I wonder if Jesus had a crush on one of his teenage neighbors. We certainly knew he had female and male disciples. Although I think Jesus honored women with great respect, it certainly would not have been a sin for him to be attracted to Mary Magdalene or some of his other friends.

Maybe Jesus was like us in other ways too. Maybe he got frustrated by politics and at times needed to go outside and hike in the mountains to calm himself down. I bet Jesus enjoyed fishing like many people we all know. He enjoyed laughter and parties. Based on one of his miracles- turning water into wine, we can assume he enjoyed good tasting wine. He would probably enjoy wine tasting here in the Willamette Valley.

I know some might debate this next idea. But I bet Jesus sometimes got sick and needed the help of his friends. I bet he got the flu or a bad cold from time to time. Maybe he had allergies or a sore back from working with his dad. I imagine he skinned his knee playing with friends and hit his thumb with a hammer while helping Joseph do some carpentry.

Remember being sick is not a sin and Jesus had to learn to be careful with a hammer just like we do. Speaking of sin, did Jesus ever make mistakes while learning something new and if so, are mistakes always sinful? Did he ever talk back to his parents and then learn over time how to be obedient. My hunch is that Jesus was a strong-willed kid and

grew in maturity over time. These are good questions to ask God in heaven one day, but for now we can marvel at the humanity of Jesus and consider how he was like us.

One reason it is good to consider the humanity of Jesus is that we often focus more on his divinity. The divinity part of Jesus is a lot of fun to ponder as well. The miracles are amazing. The fact that he was without sin according to Scripture feels very divine of Jesus. We can be amazed at his love and forgiveness, not to mention his divine wisdom. How about his willingness to sacrifice his life on a cross even though Scripture says that he could have called angels down to protect him? The power of the resurrection is certainly a sign of his divinity. The divinity of Jesus is truly awesome.

This morning, remember the gift of the incarnation, the gift of love being made known in the birth of Jesus. It is good to ponder his humanity and his divinity.

Okay, I want to give you one more idea to ponder this morning about the gift of the incarnation.

What if God becoming one of us in Jesus is not only so that we can know God's love more personally as Mother Teresa suggests but is also so that we can know ourselves more fully.

Jesus certainly is special. He is the only begotten Son of God, the Savior of the World. There is only one Jesus. However, Jesus came to show us that we are all children of God. We all our Sons and Daughters of God and we all our loved by God. As a Catholic Priest once told me, we all have God's DNA because we all our children of God. Maybe Jesus came to remind us that being human is connected to being divine as well. In a sense Jesus reminds us of our own divinity in that we all are part of God's creation and therefore have our origin in God. We have a divine and human nature rooted in God's love. Jesus came to show us we come from God. We often focus as human beings on how different we are from God, but what if God came to earth in human form to show us

that we are actually more like God than we think. Maybe Jesus shows us that God's nature is love and we have a divine nature of love as well because we come from God. What if the Celtic writer, John O'Donahue is right when he says in his book *Anam Cara*, that our deepest nature as human beings is love. What if God becoming one of us as love incarnate in Jesus is to restore us to our deepest nature as beloved children of God born of love and descendent of love.

If this sounds new, I promise you that it is not. Christians through the centuries have emphasized the goodness of humanity and our deep connection to the divine. In Jesus we are reminded again to embrace how the human and divine come together in him and remarkably also in us.

As we begin a new year and a new beginning may we ponder the beauty of the incarnation of Jesus, both his humanity and his divinity.

Let us also ponder that we are children of God uniquely divine and human as well through our connection with Jesus, who is our Savior

and friend and who was with God in the beginning because he is God and all things were created in Him. May this truth enable us to walk into a new year filled with love and hope and may we marvel that the light of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome his power of love in our lives and for the world.

Let us pray...

John 1:1-5

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.