

CHRISTMAS DAY 2010

How can I begin to tell you in ten minutes about the impact of this one birth that took place two thousand and ten years ago? This event, this divine event that we celebrate this morning, if you will, changed the history of humankind for all time.

Let's begin with the fact that it wasn't originally called "Christmas." That term originated when the church chose December 25 as the date to celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's simply Middle English for "Christ's Festival." That became the principal date to remember the most momentous event in human history known as the "Incarnation." You will not find the word Christmas or its celebration in the Bible but you will find this day referred to as the "Nativity" or "Incarnation."

The day the Word or Logos became flesh, as St. John, writes. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:14

Each year as the world becomes more and more secular we find ourselves drawn farther and farther away from the celebration of the Incarnation and closer and closer to the comfortable Christmas we have created. But are they the same thing?

Forgive me if for a few minutes I take you from the cozy manger beneath the tree and place you in a remote little village in Palestine, just a dot on the map, a place called Bethlehem, (Hebrew for House of Bread.) A little town that virtually no one outside of Palestine even knew existed. And somewhere out back, away from the main street in that speck of a town, is where we will find the real manger. Not the nice little scene attributed to St. Francis, but a trough to feed animals.

I have been there, a small dark, damp, cold, odoriferous cave for housing livestock. Not center stage at all. Not a place where we would choose to bring the baby Jesus, Son of Emmanuel, God among us. Gee, God doesn't do things our way!

No wonder some find it hard to believe. It's beyond our comprehension. And so we have spent 2010 years dressing it all up to suit us.

The truth of the Christmas story is that God came into the world backstage, all but unnoticed by the rich and knowledgeable. Noticed only by the angels and poor uneducated shepherds and a few astrologists looking for a star, who found a king in a stable.

I guess you could say that God snuck in without all the fanfare so that God would be always more accessible to all, without human caste.

He came in the lowest of circumstances. Low so that we would have to kneel to see that baby. Low so the lowest of all shepherds would be able to approach Him, in the midst of us

so that we would hear the words of salvation and high upon the cross so that we would have to raise our heads heavenward.

No, God doesn't do things our way. The movie star comes with an entourage and cameras flashing. The president enters with his Hail to the Chief, but the Prince of Peace comes, should I say, quietly so that in recognition we would then create this celebration called "Christmas."

You see, Christmas is ours – the Incarnation is God's. I think we do a pretty good job of celebrating Christmas, but we will never buy a gift big enough or put up lights bright enough, or sing loud enough, or evolve enough traditions to outdo what God has given us.

Let me end with this thought, which I've had since I knew I would be celebrating Christmas with you this morning: John Lennon had his own song "Imagine" and here is my version of that song. Imagine if Christ Jesus had not been born what this world would be like?

His words have been our conscience for two thousand years. Therefore, Christians started schools, so people could learn to read the Bible. Christians started colleges and universities: Oxford, Cambridge, Rutgers, Yale, Williams and Mary, and many others. Hospitals were started by Christians, Lankenau, Friends, Mulenberg, and St. Luke's, etc. Places for the homeless, for orphans and widows, Christians who fight for peace when all around cry for war. Do you think atheists or agnostics started any of these?

Also, the barbarism that existed before Jesus diminished after he came and gave his teachings. It would have been obliterated had people just realized that as C.S. Lewis once wrote, "Jesus was more God than any man had ever been before or would be again."

Incarnation means "God in the flesh" and human in every way as we are but divine in Word and Spirit.

"For God so loved us, that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believeth in Him shall have life eternal."

If we could just celebrate the Incarnation with the same zeal as we celebrate Christmas. If only!

Amen.