

A Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas Day, December 28, 2014

Church of the Epiphany, Richmond, Virginia

By the Rev. David H. Knight, Interim Rector

In the Name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This morning once again we hear the words of John at the beginning, or what is called the prologue of his Gospel,

“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. What has come into being 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.”

On Christmas Eve, our waiting was over. The Messiah had come. The long-expected child of Mary has been born. This event we celebrate at Christmas is about how Jesus of Nazareth has been related from the beginning of time, the beginning of creation, to the life of all things and all people. In John’s gospel there is no nativity story, there are no animals in the manger, no shepherds and angels. Instead, he tells us of the relationship between God and God’s only son and how that precious relationship extends to embrace all of humankind.

“And the Word became flesh.” This is the most significant claim of the Christian faith. God has been working on behalf of creation itself from the beginning of time when the earth was formless and void, since before Adam named the animals of the field and the birds of the air. According to John, it is the very basis upon which you and I become the children of God.

“And the Word became flesh.” This proclaims the central message of Christmas. God has become flesh in the birth of Jesus in that manger in Bethlehem. It means that God now experiences what it is like to be us. The Creator comes and lives as a human being among the created. Through God’s son, God would experience on a human level all that we experience. God would feel our joy and our pain. In doing so there comes for us a source of hope in the face of the persistent question: Why is there evil in this world? How can a loving God allow devastation and calamity to happen? How can a loving God allow tragedy to happen in our lives? It is to questions such as these that God promises hope because with all of its beauty Christmas does not stand alone or in isolation from the whole story of Jesus, his birth, his living among us, his death and his resurrection. We look beyond Christmas to remember how Jesus would grow into adulthood and following his baptism by John would begin his ministry. We remember what Jesus would experience in the form of his own suffering and ultimately his own rejection which would lead to his crucifixion. We remember that he would triumph over every form of evil so that you and I might be able finally to do the same. We find comfort and most of all, hope in the recognition that *“the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”* Despite immeasurable catastrophe, hope persists. As you and I look back over our own experience we can, perhaps, remember how when even in the darkest moments of our experience, light somehow did begin to shine in that darkness and we began to find hope

again. And if for some reason this morning, you are finding hope to be illusive and remote, today's promise proclaimed in the gospel is that light will shine once again and glimpses of hope for you will become a reality.

The incarnation of Jesus we celebrate in this Christmas season—that is, his whole life, death, and resurrection—is at the very heart of the sacred mystery. We come to recognize that God is in the ordinary moments of our lives, in the ordinary tasks that you and I have to perform, in the ordinary encounters we have with one another.

At the heart of the Christmas story is that your life, your joys, and sorrows, all of your relationships, all of these, matter to God because of what happened in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. All human life, all human experience, is important to God. By becoming one of us in Jesus, God has blessed and transformed all of human life. You and I have become part of a divine mystery.

“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.”

That life is the light of God given to all of us and it is available to each of us whoever we may be. You and I are part of this sacred mystery. Your story, your past and your future all are holy and blessed. May you and I, therefore, persevere in hope and in joy.

I would like to leave with you this morning the words of the anthem that our choir will be singing next Sunday afternoon when Bishop Shannon is with us for his visitation as they speak to us as we go from our Christmas celebration out into the duties of each day. The anthem is titled “Christmas Joy.”:

“When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky has withdrawn,
When the kings see their prophesy rightly fulfilled,
When the princes and shepherds have gone;
Then the true work of Christmas begins.
To find the lost, to heal the broken hearts,
To feed the hungry, to free the pris'ner,
To rebuild the nations, to bring peace among all. . .
To make music in the heart.
When the song of the angels is stilled,
Then the true work of Christmas begins.”