

For the people of St. Philip's  
Year A, Christmas I  
December 30, 2007  
Maria Hoecker, preacher  
John 1:1-18

Well, here we are in the midst of the Twelve Days of Christmas. Seems like I was just standing here on Christmas Eve, preaching on this very same Gospel. I'm curious, how many of you were here at an evening service on Christmas Eve? Well, I guess I could've just gone ahead and preached that sermon again! Oh well. But I'm not, I've got some more to say on John's Gospel reading. It's still Christmas, we're half way through Christmastide. Next Sunday is Epiphany. It is during these twelve days of Christmas that we can set aside some time to consider just what God has done in the birth of Jesus.

In some homes by now Christmas is over. The tree has been taken down, perhaps decorations put away. Stores are advertising year-end sales. I was out yesterday looking around and was surprised to see the stores so crowded. Target had its Valentines merchandise out. Some people have already bought presents and Christmas cards for next year at significant savings, though I myself am not *that* organized.

Thank goodness, here in the church it is still Christmas. We have the space of time in 12 precious days to focus on the wonder of God's love and what it means. I'd like to talk a bit today about some basic beliefs that we as Christians hold about the birth of Jesus. Beginning with Advent, each year we move through a liturgical calendar that walks us through the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Advent, Christmastide, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter, Eastertide, Pentecost. Each year we relive the glorious miracle of the Incarnation of God.

This is our first basic belief. We believe in the Incarnate Christ: "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." Wake up! This is radical. No one had ever seen anything like this before. Think about it for a minute. God decided to enter into a personal relationship with all of humanity. God became like you and me. God could have chosen simply to watch and see what would happen, but instead chose to connect, interact, and experience the human condition. Not only that, God limited the experience to what we experience—no special privileges. Fully human, fully divine in the person of Jesus Christ. God took on the living conditions of the time: the smell, the thirst and poverty, the scorn, the betrayal, the ravages of disease and discomfort. Jesus was not offered anything better than others because of who he was. God felt that first-hand. Through Jesus, God humbled himself for us and for our salvation.

So, what does that mean, really? The Incarnate Christ? It means God wants to be in a growing relationship with *all* of us, not just a chosen few. God wants us to know we are loved, valued, and worth saving, that we are precious. *All of us*. God wants to draw us together into a kingdom of life that is abundant and rich, that has lots of entry points and that involves many different people. All sinners, all of us---all saved, if we just believe that the Word became Flesh.

Christ Incarnate also gives us our purpose. If God chose to come and live among us and be like us, then our mission in the world is to seek out those *especially* who are marginal, lonely, lost, in prison, hurt, angry, afraid, and unsuccessful right where we live—and *we are to hang out with them*. Only then can we be their light in the darkness. Only then will we experience God's grace by being in solidarity with them--the powerless.

This us leads to a second core belief - we believe in Christ the Redeemer.

God decided the world was worth redeeming, and chose to act by coming among us and giving us a model for humanity in Jesus Christ. We no longer have to stumble in the dark, wondering who we are supposed to become. Jesus simplified all the laws to their most basic element. God *is* Love. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

God's redeeming, abundant love flows into each of us through our Baptism, even though that is the beginning of a life-long project of remodeling and rebuilding. Jesus has moved in and nothing will ever be the same because of it. Instead of God saying, "Let's see what they will do..." God says, "Here is what I am going to do". God continually acts in a

profound way, and we celebrate our rebirth with every Eucharist, reminding ourselves of God's love for all and of our part in it.

A third belief that we share is that of the Eternally begotten Christ. Jesus didn't simply show up one day a couple of thousand years ago, and he wasn't adopted. Jesus doesn't just join a long line of wise prophets. "In the beginning was the Word", according to John's Gospel. In the Creed we state "Eternally begotten of the Father...of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made." Jesus was present and participated in Creation—all of it: suns, galaxies, planets, the earth and all that is in it.

We are not just enjoying an inspiring relationship with a really good guy from Galilee. Jesus changes everything, before and since. In Christ the divine Creator, through the power of the Holy Spirit, when we are baptized we enter into a personal relationship with *everything* that is created-- everything-- in all places and in all times. We are tied to each other through all of time. This principal has never quite caught on in our culture, but other cultures, including the Native American, have always known and believed in the sacred and eternal relationship of all life.

Being in relationship with Christ Eternal means the world is not ours to possess. We are stewards of this world, not its possessors. All that we see is ours to care for, and includes the land, water, the animals, and plants, and the people of this earth. How we live as a people of an eternally living and eternally creating Christ should be evident in terms of how we use things, preserve and recycle them, and what we leave behind for others. We Americans consume so much of the world's available resources and luxuries while others are in want. Hopefully, an eternally living Christ empowers us to see and create, out of our own abundance, new life and possibilities so that all people will have what they need.

Already, on this first Sunday of Christmastide, we have come quite a distance from the babe in the manger. This tiny babe in our crèche stretches our beliefs beyond our imaginations. Christ Incarnate. Christ our Redeemer. Light from Light. Eternally begotten from God. This day should not be one where we walk away from the crib but rather this day can be where we walk right into the crèche, for the babe of Bethlehem has brought to us profound power for redeeming all broken relationships. Although many people will be glad to see the old year pass away, ridden as all years are with turmoil, terror, and upheaval, but we can greet the New Year with something more than relief.

We can greet this year with our belief. It's so simple, as simple as loving. Yeah, right. *Simple*, and yet it requires so much of us-- just to be open to the possibilities.

Our time has come, the waiting is over. With deep and abiding joy we gather together to celebrate what we believe. What we've all been waiting for: Emmanuel—God is with us!  
Alleluia!

(source and commentary for the list of three beliefs: Rev. Canon Ben E. Helmer.)