

John 1:1, 14

It might be a little confusing to someone who is brand new to the Faith - this Christmas event. He might wonder, "When, really, is Christmas? Was it last night, or is it today?" We had a Christmas service yesterday evening, and we're having another one this morning. It's the only time we do this. We don't have an Easter celebration the night before and then also on Easter morning. We don't have a Pentecost Eve service and then one on Pentecost Day. But we do for Christmas. We celebrate it twice; two special services.

Maybe we just really like singing Christmas carols. But nonetheless, today seems a little redundant. The real drama was last night. Jesus was born at night. The angel announced to the shepherds that the Christ Child was born when it was night. No one really important is born during the day; especially God. In fact, He turns our night into day by His coming. So today's Christmas service is sort of anti-climactic. It's Christmas, but it's more our response to what happened the night before.

But that does put us in good company. Luke tells us that after Jesus was born, and after the shepherds came to, and then left the stable, when it was all over with, "*Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*" She wasn't glad that the Christmas event was finally over with. She certainly was exhausted. She had just given birth to a baby boy. God hurt her. He inflicted great pain on her in coming out of her womb. But rather than putting the pain out of her memory, and sleeping off her exhaustion, she meditated. She sat there by the manger pondering the meaning of it all.

Mary's pondering is also our own. Christmas does not mean different things to different people. At least it shouldn't. There is one significance of Christmas. It's meaning is the same for all sinners. We heard St. John's words this morning: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.*"

This is the meaning of Christmas. We like to throw in cookies and decorated trees, presents and Santa Claus, and a host of other things. And that's fine. It helps to embellish the holiday season. But the one true meaning of Christmas is Christ. And listen to the way John's words sound in the Greek text - how these words were originally written: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was turned toward God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.*"

The Word, the Son of God, was turned toward God. This was His posture from eternity. But in the fullness of time the Word became flesh and He turned Himself toward the cross of Calvary. This is why Christmas had to happen. This is why the Word had to become flesh. So that His flesh could be nailed to a cross. So that His blood could be spilled for sinners. Christmas has absolutely no meaning apart from Good Friday. Jesus' birth means nothing without His death and resurrection. But take them together and you have the Gospel.

And this Gospel is for you, for you and I are poor sinners. We were turned away from God. We turn toward ourselves; toward our passions and lusts. But the Word became flesh to turn and face the cross for you and me. And so God turns to each one of you and says, "I forgive you. I forgive you for turning away from Me. My Son turned to face the penalty you deserve. You, dear sinner, are forgiven."

And so now on this Christmas Day we have the privilege to turn toward the Sacrament on the altar. For here the Word made flesh is turned toward us in love. Here is where love comes down at Christmas. Here is God turned toward you with His face smiling upon you with mercy and grace, with His forgiveness for you given to you in the most personal, intimate way. Here is the Word made flesh dwelling among us full of the gift of truth. This is Christmas. This is why we celebrate it twice. This is where the real drama happens; where you become one with God through the Word who became flesh for you. Amen.