

12.25.2021 Christmas Day (Hebrews 1, John 1)

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14).

Those are very familiar words from the Gospel according to St. John. His prologue was the final lesson read last night, and the same passage is our Gospel reading this morning, because nowhere is the great mystery of the Incarnation more beautifully expressed and profoundly unfolded than in the Gospel of St. John. The glorious, comfortable truth that the Son of God, the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity, assumed human flesh, body and soul, and dwelt among us in order to manifest His great love for us is the center of our Christmas celebration. As you know, in our changing culture Christmas means a lot of different things to a lot of different people, but to those who receive Him, to those who *“believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13), to us the meaning of Christmas is found in Jesus Christ, the Word of God who forever entered time and history through the holy mystery of the Incarnation.

The Danish philosopher and theologian, Soren Kierkegaard, once sought to describe the Incarnation as a love between a king and a peasant girl. She had no royal pedigree, no education, no standing in the royal court. This humbled the king, and the king sometimes do. Why he should love her was beyond explaining, but love her he did, and she loved him. One day there awoke in the heart of the king an anxious thought: How in the world is he going to reveal his love to this girl? How could he bridge the great chasm that separated the two of them? His advisers, of course, told him that all he had to do was command her to become his queen, and it would be done, for he was a man of immense power. Every statesman feared his wrath, every foreign power trembled before him, and every officer in his court groveled in the dust at the sound of his voice. This poor peasant girl would have no power to resist, she would have to become the queen.

But power, even unlimited power, cannot command love. The king could force her body to be present in the palace, but he could not force love to be present in her heart. He might be able to gain her obedience this way but coerced submission is not what he wanted. He longed for intimacy of heart and oneness of spirit, and all the power in the world cannot unlock the human heart, it must be opened from within.

So he met with his advisers once again and they suggested he try to bridge the chasm by elevating her to his position. He could shower her with gifts, dress her in purple and silk, and have her crowned the queen. But if he brought her to his palace, if he radiated the sun of his magnificence over her, if she saw all the wealth, pomp, and power of his greatness, then she would certainly be overwhelmed. How would he ever know if she loved him for himself, or only for all that he had given her?

Every plan he came up with came to nothing, until finally, compelled by love, the king thought of a way. Early the next day the king arose, took off his crown, relinquished his scepter, laid aside his royal robes, and took upon himself the life of a peasant. He dressed in rags, scratched out a living in the dirt, and dwelt in a shack.

The king did not simply take on the outward appearance of a servant, he became a servant. This was his real life, his real nature, his real burden. This great king became as humble as the one he loved so that she could be his forever. This he did, and he won his bride.

No analogy fully reveals the mysterious and wonderful works of God, but as we reflect on this story of a mighty king who found the perfect, sacrificial way to manifest his love for a humble maiden, we come to a greater understanding of the King of Kings, and the way in which the Incarnation and the birth of our Savior are a perfect declaration of God's immeasurable love for mankind.

The story presents us with the truth that a mighty king could choose any number of ways to crown a queen. He could lure her with thoughts of power and prestige, overwhelm her with all the finest things, even overpower her with a royal decree that commands her to sit at his side. In a similar sense, theologians like Kierkegaard, Augustine, and Aquinas believe that Almighty God, by His Infinite power, could have chosen any number of ways to manifest His love for us and accomplish His goal of redeeming the world, but as the story reveals, though there are many ways, there is one perfect way.

The passages we read today describe the perfect way that God chose to reveal His love and bridge the great chasm that separated us from Him. We read that God, who spoke to ancient people in different times, different places, and in different ways, chose "*in these last days*" to speak to us "*by His Son*"

(Hebrews 1:2), His *Word* spoken in the *flesh*. Like the king from Kierkegaard's parable, God chose to reveal His love and win His bride by speaking to us in person, by truly becoming one of us, by trading His throne in heaven for a manger. Consider the divinely revealed Truth that our Lord, the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who ruled the universe that He created from His throne in glory, who reigned in majesty beyond anything we can imagine, did not simply take on the outward appearance of a human, He became fully human, beginning His human life as a one-cell embryo in Mary's womb. The King of Kings became as humble as the one He loves so that she could be His bride forever.

God knew how easily He could overwhelm and overpower us, compromising our free-will, leaving us unable to freely give our love to Him. So, the King of Heaven came to us in great humility. He chose the perfect way... because of who He is! God chose, two thousand years ago, to be born to peasants and welcomed by shepherds, because the Creator intimately, and infinitely, loves His creation. As we celebrate Christmas Day bring to mind this baby born in Bethlehem, and consider the unimaginable miracle that God the Son, who made heaven and earth, vast beyond our comprehension, chose to enter His creation in pursuit of you. Consider all that He gave up at Christmas to come to you, consider the greater truth that He came not only to live with you, but to die for you, and you will never again doubt the extent of God's love for you.

This is the meaning of Christmas.