

Sermon for Christmas Day, December 25, 2022

Nativity of Our Lord

“God in a Body, God in our Bodies”

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Decorah, Iowa

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Emanuel, God with us.

The Word became flesh. God born in a human body. This is good news of great joy.

Our bodies have been hurting the last few years, the last few days, plagued by threats and nagging questions. As winds whip across fresh snow and temperatures plummet, how will we stay warm? Is it wise to travel? How silly *do* I look walking like a penguin on the ice? As viruses rage and hospitals fill yet again, how will we protect elders and little ones? How long does long COVID last?

When will black lives, black bodies, finally matter to us all? When will children be safe in our schools? How will the hungry be fed in Haiti, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Palestine, at the southern border? How will we all be fed as the climate changes quickly? These questions linger in the corners of our gatherings, in the back of our minds. We change the subject, turn off the news, seek an escape. Yet still they press in.

God draws closer still. God does not stand at a distance from bodies braced against the cold, bodies yearning for food, bodies aching with grief. God doesn't say, "Well, my thoughts and prayers are with you. Best wishes for the new year." No, God becomes flesh and lives among us. God knows what it is to have blistered feet, ingrown toenails, sinus congestion; what it is to long for the familiar smells of home; to feel that empty ache in the chest when a loved one dies. There is nothing of our life that is foreign to God. Nothing that can separate us from God.

As Martin Luther said, God became human so that humans can become one with God. Luther calls this the Happy Exchange. In Christ, God took all our failures, our sin, our death into God's own self, God's own body, and gave us forgiveness, light and life. This happens most fully now in Holy Communion. In this meal of Jesus' body and blood, Christ enters every fiber and cell of our being so that we will share every part of God's grace and truth. God is born again, within us. In this way, God's presence in the world is multiplied abundantly - we become loaves and fishes to feed a hungry world.

We become the presence of God to one another, to a world in need. We experience God in those all around us. Pastor Eugene Peterson has a gorgeous translation of John 1, our Gospel for today. It includes this phrase, "the word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." God is not at a distance. God lives now in that run down house around the corner, in that part of town you always want to avoid, in that noisy, chaotic, or all too quiet place you call home. God lives now in your body, in the bodies of your neighbors and those you fear, despise, ignore.

God takes on all this sin so that we will experience forgiveness, light and life deep within, so that we will be forgiveness, light and life for the world.

The Word has become flesh.
The Word lives now among us.
Good news of great joy.

Thanks be to God.