

Sermon by The Rev. Betsy Johns Roadman, 12/25/05
St. Augustine's Church, Croton-on-Hudson, New York
Christmas Day; Text: John 1:1-14

I hope that worship on Christmas morning doesn't feel like a letdown to you. The Christmas Eve services are crammed with lots more stuff than this one is – overflowing crowds, music, acolytes, the lighting of congregational candles in the darkness.

Also included in the Christmas Eve services is the reading of the beautiful and engaging story of the birth of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, with all of the familiar details – Mary giving birth to the baby and laying him in a manger, the shepherds in the fields, following a star, the heavenly host singing, “Glory to God in the highest.”

On Christmas morning, there's a lot less going on. We have the gift of quiet and space to reflect on what the coming of Christ means for us, as Christians. John's Gospel, appointed for this morning, helps us make sense of the incarnation – that which we're celebrating this weekend.

The beautiful, poetic words of John, with their stirring images, proclaim that in the person of Jesus, God has been made known to us in ways not possible before. God had first been revealed through the glory of God's creation. God had also been revealed through the prophets – people to and through whom God communicated with special messages. God had been revealed through the stories and the tradition of the people of Israel.

John announces a new revelation of God – Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus, according to John, means that the transcendent God is neither remote nor abstract. The creative power, presence, and love that is God has been revealed in and through flesh and blood – a reality that we can truly grasp. We don't have to guess what a life full of God might look like. God-with-us, in the person of Jesus Christ, means that we can hear, see, know, and experience God in ways that we can understand at the very core of our being.

According to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, John wrote, “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” A more accurate translation might be, “The Word became flesh and pitched his tent where we are.” That image would have resonated deeply with the earliest followers of Jesus. They would have remembered, in the words of theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, that “... in the desert, on the way to the promised land, the shade of the tent provided rest, meaning, and courage for the long march ahead.” The Word became flesh and pitched his tent where we are.

A contemporary translation says, “The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.” That hits home with us. God has come to be with us – right here on Mt. Airy Road, Lexington Drive, Brook Trail, and Illington Road. God has come, entering into everything we experience in our day-to-day lives – our joy and our despair; our health and our disease and pain; our confidence and our confusion; our success and our

weakness. God has come to us, to live among us in our fullness and our grief; our reconciliations and our separations; our celebrations and our suffering.

The revelation of God that has come to us in and through the person of Jesus Christ, who has moved into the neighborhood, means that God has entered the messiest corners of our lives. We don't have to clean up our acts before we dare to approach God. We don't have to make ourselves right in the eyes of God before we can experience God. God has come to us, as we are right now, so that we may know for ourselves the very God who created us, who redeemed us, and who sustains us.

Because God is love, God chose to be revealed to us in flesh and blood and to move into our neighborhood and into our lives. The incarnation connects our everyday, ordinary experience with the glory of the living God. There is no part of ourselves, no part of our lives that we need hold back. God's presence and love touch every fiber of who we are and what we're about.

This is astounding news. Sometimes, with all of the other stuff that surrounds Christmas, this reality gets lost. But this morning, with things a little quieter, we have the opportunity to sit with this best possible news, and to try to take it in.

This is the good news of Christmas: God has been fully and perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus was born a human being, so that we could know and experience God in ways that we can understand. God has come to us, right where we live, so that each of us might know the presence, the power, and the love of God in our own lives.

May we respond to this news by flinging open the door of our hearts and our lives to God, and welcoming God in. Amen.