

Beyond Imagination

Menno Mennonite Church
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December 25, 2022

Purpose: To celebrate the coming of God with us.

Message: God with us means that God beyond our imagination is no longer dependent on our ability to imagine God. We are invited into all the God is.

Scripture: John 1:1-14 [I will read]; Isaiah 52:7–10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:14, (5–12)

Synopsis: For all Christmas is, a celebration of the incredible doesn't rank highly. Sure, we have Santa Claus and making sense of the magic of Christmas. Seldom do our rational brains lose their tight grips to let us imagine the wonder of what we are really talking about in Christmas: that God—the unimaginable, unobtainable, look-on-me-and-surely-die YHWH God comes and is WITH us, in us, part of us, in us—the good and the bad. In that coming, in the word made flesh, we can know God. This is the fuller magic of Christmas, and what we truly celebrate today.

Thanks be to God.

Notes

Commentary: evernote:///view/31369896/s249/d979c026-cb88-44ee-9db9-a13e4ff522c7/bddd0c0c-3b5c-41d5-91ff-682c8826082c

Sermon: evernote:///view/31369896/s249/ef525207-2996-4e1a-bed1-839f9191a117/2c0e829c-0ff5-4023-bfa0-a4ebb1ad1a14

John 1:1-14 (NRSV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God.

³ All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being ⁴ in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.

⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world,
and the world came into being through him;
yet the world did not know him.

¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,

¹³ who were born, not of blood
or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son,
full of grace and truth.

I would like you to do some recollection this morning. Christmas morning is as good as any morning to think back when, and I am guessing that you are doing just that by invitation or not. I would like you to think of a memorable Christmas. Perhaps when your kids were young and filled the anticipation on opening something special. Or the time when the weather just made everything difficult and weird (perhaps that's a bit too close to home this year, but you get the point). As you remember, think about your senses of the time—the place, the smells, feels and sensations of that time. Perhaps you recall the food or the music playing softly in the background. Maybe it is easy to remember because, well, it's Christmas—the time of traditions and being together. You know what was there because it is always there and that way, at least at that time. What ever it is, and wherever your memory has taken you, I am guessing the memories were clear and present with you even without my prompting.

Now let's imagine something else; and that something is, nothing. I am not talking empty, sort of open, or just rather blank; think of nothing whatsoever. Vacuum. Blank. Void. Darkness. If you are envisioning the prairie sky with open space in between endless plains, you are not there yet; the landscape indeed is something—a lot of something as we know well. Nothing is a term we cite every day yet is a concept that we can never really imagine because it is so fundamentally foreign to our lived reality. It is out of frame, and therefore out of mind. Like gas that expands to fit what ever container you place it in, so do our minds expand upon what we cannot understand to have it make sense.

All of which is a bit philosophic and navel gazing for a Sunday morning, especially Christmas morning. But stick with me if you will. Because The point of this text is not to be found in the impossible to conceive of concepts with which it starts, but rather in the very real way in which these same concepts and ideas come to us in the incarnation. The word, the light, become flesh and dwells among us. The good news is that this light, this word, this massive, abstract God who is beyond our very notions, beyond our very basic conceptions, beyond our very language, is made real, in real time, in the real world, to real people, born of real humanity to make real change in the world. That is the good news of Christmas: is the that unimaginable God need not be imagined. The point of the Incarnation is though we cannot see the impossible largeness of God in its entirety—it is just not we are prepared to see—we also don't have to. The incarnation starting with Christ, and continuing in Christ in us, we see the impossible largeness of God's love in the particular face of the other, the particular knowledge of the way of Christ in

the world, in the ways that we are in the world, in the ways that we recognize the face of the universal God in the very real face of the other. How amazing is that? How wonderful is that God chooses to come and make himself known to us in the way that is also most familiar to us—in the very shape of vulnerability and human frailty as a child born into a broken world with all the challenges that this involves. The thing we know most well, yet are ever in awe of, becomes the context into which the holy is known.

As such we do not need to imagine the unimaginable. It is a scary thing to think about the God of the universe, to ask the big questions and wonder why. We can look at the marvels of the universe and hear numbers that boggle our minds in considering just how many galaxies, planets and all the rest there are, and we can be amazed, and perhaps feel a bit small along the way. We may not be the most important beings in the universe; but we know that we are loved and can love through the incarnated reality of God with us. God reaches out to us because we are God's beloved creation, in which we can see the vestiges of God in each one if we would but look. Because of the incarnation, of the word made flesh, we need not approach God only by means of impossible questions and abstract ideas, but in the real faces of our brothers and sisters all around us, living life, making mistakes, creating new expressions of love and hope in the day-to-day ordinariness of our tangible lives, expressing the universal intangible love of God.

Because of the incarnation we simply do not need to look for God in the abstract remote and large places. Most of the time when we do, we only found ourselves confused and lost. Instead, when we need to know God, we need to know those who are with us, the faces and incarnations of God that are so profoundly real that we do not always know them as part of the incarnation. As much as we would love to have angel choirs and a star to follow, confirming for us the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary, we are instead given the world as it is and the radical promise that no matter what, the light is in the world, and the light cannot be overcome. If we wish to see God—if we really want to know what God is about, we need to look no further than our bodies, ourselves, and our neighbors and know the Christ within them each. The word made flesh dwells among us and is part of our world. And no matter how bad it gets, God remains here and with us, weeping when we weep, laughing as we laugh, and reaching out always to show us the way of Christ in our midst.

YHWH God, the God of the beginning when the word was all there was, and in that word created all that there is, that God is found in the word made flesh, in the form of the Christ

who comes and lives with and through us that we might know God. This is God who teaches us, leads us, challenges us in the for of the Christ. This is God who takes his love all the way to the grave and out the other side if only to declare that there is no place where God is not.

We celebrate a birthday today yes; that is important. Of course, this is the time of declaring fully and boldly that Christ is born. Even more so we celebrate the inauguration of the reign and the living and incarnate God, the beginning of our knowing that God is not one on which we dare not look lest we die, but is the one who has come to set things right and wants to be in relationship with us; with us, and to love the world through us. That is something fully worthy of celebrating, and more so, of embracing with all of our hearts.

May this Christmas be Merry for all the reasons of peace, Joy, hope, and Love that are ours in this season, and may the Love of God in Christ Jesus, of God with us, shine in our hearts, and in our lives this day and everyday as we proclaim our Joy to the world knowing God with us. Amen.