

The First Sunday after Christmas Day, 2008
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

This sermon follows the lessons of the RCL (Episcopal Usage), notably: John 1:1-18

Today is the First Sunday after Christmas and, by tradition, we always read the prologue to John's Gospel as the gospel reading for this Eucharist. This prologue is the great theological statement about the Incarnation, our understanding that in Jesus God became human and lived among us for a time. We believe that by his resurrection Jesus continues to live among us as the risen Christ. The gospels written by Matthew and Luke are content to give us, in written form, the oral tales that circulated about the birth of Jesus, but John's gospel goes much deeper, even while not presenting a birth narrative. It seeks to give us the meaning behind the birth narratives; it explains, theologically, how it is that God became one of us and why that is important. As a result of John's effort, Christianity has a very strong understanding that God is immanent and present, not distant and aloof. From this we understand God as involved and caring for his creation, especially creation's highpoint, humankind.

John tells us that, in Jesus, God's Word became flesh. There is a lot in that statement. The Judeo-Christian understanding of God the Creator is that God created everything from nothing by saying "Let there be..." What John tells us is that Jesus is this very creating aspect of God, his Word, in human form. John said, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him. What came into being with him was life, and the life was the light of all people." John goes on to say that "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. "No one has ever seen God," John said. It is God the only son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

Every year, on this First Sunday after Christmas, the Church reads John's prologue. Not that many years ago, in the Anglo-Catholic parishes at least, we read this passage at the end of every Eucharist. We read it with both priest and people kneeling. Now days, we hear this reading only once a year. But, as each Sunday points to Easter, because each Eucharist celebrates the miracle of Christ's resurrection, so each celebration of the Eucharist brings us into the tangible presence of our Incarnate Lord, and the liturgy should remind us of the Incarnation.

In our faith, we, also, are an incarnate people. When we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, God dwells in us. We are filled with the presence of God and we remain as filled with the Spirit as we allow ourselves to be. So, to the extent that we permit it, God is incarnate in us, too.

We are blessed by God and are his children because Jesus makes us so. Our acceptance as children of God is certainly not of our own doing. It is God's gift to us and it is a daily gift, given through the miracle of the Incarnation and the Incarnate Son's Resurrection.

On this first Sunday after Christmas, as the twelve days of Christmas continue, let us rejoice and thank God for this gift of the Messiah. *Amen.*