

## Christmas 2022

Happy Christmas.

This is a day so important that it actually has three names.

First, the word Christmas comes from Christ Mass, which refers to exactly what we are doing here, gathering as a group of God's creatures to celebrate God and especially, the birth of Jesus.

This is why we also refer to this day as the Feast of the Nativity, that is, the feast of the birth of Jesus.

Of course, the nativity and the incarnation are two sides of the same coin, so, looking at the birth from the other side, from the perspective of Christ's coming into the world as Jesus, we get a third name—the Feast of the Incarnation.

The remarkable assertion of Christianity is that Christ's incarnation as Jesus is merely one instance of uncountable beautiful incarnations, for everything that exists is an incarnation of God.

That includes *us*.

Julian of Norwich wondered for many years why God would incarnate as all these things.

She tells us that one day she finally received an answer.

“What, do you wish to know our Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well, Love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For Love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end.”

Simply put, the creation was by love for love.

God, who is love, poured Godself out as *us* in order to have someone with whom to relate—love requires relationship.

We cannot have love without relationship anymore than we can have light without space.

If we make love our priority, we continue to grow in love, and there is nothing more important than this for us to know, without end.

Why then, did God not just keep us nearby, in the celestial realm, as it were?

For what purpose is this earth and the time we spend on it?

God incarnated as this universe in order to provide us a place to learn, to grow in our understanding of the importance of love, of relationship.

Earth is like spiritual bootcamp that prepares us to be even closer to God.

The difficulties and opportunities we encounter here teach us.

Then, at just the right time, God incarnated as Jesus to teach us so that we do not get lost in this world, do not lose sight of our purpose here, do not mistake this world for the end goal.

When we get lost, we may end up following some guy on YouTube who tells us to live our best lives.

In attempting to do so, we chase some imagined excellent life, a life that is always better than the one we have, than anyone has, which leaves us feeling like failures.

We miss the beauty of what is as we chase what can never be.

In the process, we miss all the important lessons along the way and tend to become confused about what love is.

There is an epidemic of loneliness in our society as we have been trained to focus on everything but relationship.

We focus on image, on approval.

We package our lives for the consumption of others, the entertainment of others on social media.

We call our followers our friends, even though they are not there for us when we encounter life's challenges.

Followers do not bring food to us when we are sick, sit with us when we grieve, celebrate with us when we succeed, share silence with us over a cup of coffee, help us to move.

The people who do are our friends.

Incarnation is about embodiment.

It is in the flesh.

It requires physical presence, not just a carefully crafted message sent through the internet.

That is a substitute for something that has no equal—being there.

To be *there* means to be present.

It is a gift that everyone can give to someone.

Rather than living our best lives, therefore, we should be concerned about doing our best at life.

Rather than asking ourselves what would Jesus do, we must ask ourselves what Christ is doing.

What is our relationship to the rest of the incarnation, the rest of the body of Christ?

Are we being present to others?

Are we acting as a member of the body?

Christianity's remarkable claim that the whole world is incarnational means that love is the nature of reality, that relationship underlies everything.

The universe is not made of star stuff, but of God stuff.

Physicists look for the unified theory, the theory of everything, but have not been able to see beyond a certain level of existence.

That is because what unifies everything is beyond quarks and forces.

It is God, it is love that holds everything in existence.

The universe is about integrity and compassion and truth and presence.

These are the things for which we long.

These are the things that we can offer to others.

Christ incarnated as Jesus to teach us so that we do not get confused about love, do not get lost in its various expressions.

We say that we love pizza.

This is our seeking the satiety of God.

There is romantic love.

This is our seeking the comfort of God.

Some of our ways of seeking God are more in accord with God, others more about trying to be God.

Some even say, for example, that they love violence.

They are seeking the strength of God.

Everything we do is seeking God, whether we know it or not.

Behind all of our temporary goals is the eternal that allows the temporary to be.

This means that love is not getting whatever we want.

It is not being nice.

It is living in accord with reality, actively engaging in the profound relationship that we all share.

Being present means living lives of truth, humility, integrity, compassion.

It means learning to work together, learning to *be* together.

We are to live in meaningful, face-to-face relationships with others, exactly what we do here at St. James, where people work together to build a community in which everyone is at home, everyone can be him- or herself, as God created, in relationship with others.

We turn our gifts, no matter what they are, to the purposes of God.

We all have things to work on.

We learn together.

We invite others into the path of healing.

Incarnation is beautiful, relational, meaningful.

It is central, which is why we have three names for this day.

Through Jesus' teaching, we have a clearer sense of what our purpose here is.

We understand what brings joy and why we suffer.

We see that earth is a wonderful, though challenging opportunity.

From manger to cross, Jesus showed us how to grow into deeper relationship, how to be  
in relation, how to look at our suffering as meaningful.

Knowing all this brings peace and joy.

Happy Christmas. Happy Feast of the Incarnation.