

# TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 52  
December 25, 2022

## **C**HRISTMAS MORNING 2022

This morning we celebrate an event and a doctrine: the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, and the doctrine of the Incarnation. The event came first: the doctrine is our attempt to explain what really happened.

Christianity' is like that: our doctrine is for the most part the result of reflection on actual historical events – it is **not** the product of metaphysical speculation. God, we believe, reveals His purpose through discrete events in history, and it is this revelation that gives rise to the doctrine: history and doctrine are inextricably linked; they cannot be separated.

So, in reflecting on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as retold in the gospels, we come to understand Him as God, and we express that understanding in the doctrine of the Incarnation, a doctrine that is mind-boggling in its simplicity: God became **a** man.

Let's be clear about what we're saying. We believe that 2000 odd years ago, a child was born who was God and that He was God when He was born.

That means He didn't become God at some point later in His life; God-ness was

not something granted to Him or something He achieved. So, we're saying that it was God lying there helpless in the manger, God who nursed at the Virgin's breast, God who went through childhood and adolescence, God who learned to walk and talk, to read and write, God who acquired a trade and got a job, and God who was eventually executed as a criminal by the Roman authorities. We're saying that God, in other words, came among us at a specific point in time and in a specific place as a unique individual with His own, personal human history and so became a part of all our histories.

And what this means is that we cannot, as Christians, seek God above, beyond, below or in any way apart from history, apart, in other words, from time and place. And so it is that we cannot speak of a 'spiritual' life as something divorced from the messy, mundane events of our daily lives. Christmas makes that impossible.

A lot of people have a hard time with this. They don't want a god that confronts them in the here and now, they prefer a god who is above it all, to whom they can turn to escape the messiness of life. Such is the god of the popular "New Age" spiritualities and, unfortunately of many con-

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temporary Christians: a god who comes to us not in the birth, life and death of the man Jesus, but one who is abstracted from time and space and comes to us each individually in flashes of intuition during private meditation, or on the golf course or whatever 'method' of getting in touch with ourselves happens to be in vogue. This is a god who, in the end, denies the importance or even the reality of the world outside us and makes each of us the center of his or her own personal universe. This is a god, in other words, who ends up being us.

This, however, is not the God we gather to worship here this morning. Our God calls us out of ourselves to meet Him in the world around us, first in the Man Jesus, then, through Jesus in our relationships, in our families, friends and neighbors and even in our enemies. He is physically present to us in His Word, which we hear, and in His sacraments, in His creatures of Bread and Wine. He is with us in the here and now, not as some dispassionate observer looking down from above, but at the very heart of each encounter, each event that marks our journey through life – in the bad, as well as the good. All this is summed up in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Incarnation, in the end, is God's resounding "yes!" to His creation – the same 'yes' He uttered at the beginning, when He looked on what He had made

and saw that it was very good. And at Christmas He invites us to join Him in that "yes!" We are called to say yes to God, to His Creation and especially to each other – which is what we do ritually at these gatherings when we exchange the peace.

That is the real message of Christmas – and what better vehicle for that 'yes' than the face of a new born child? I can't think of any circumstance in which a human comes closer to the spirit of God's yes to creation in Genesis than when parents look into the face of their newborn child. And it's a 'yes' that is valid for a lifetime: nothing that comes later can erase that first 'yes'.

So it is with Christmas. We know there are clouds on the horizon – indeed, three days from now we commemorate the Holy Innocents, those victims of Herod's homicidal paranoia. And in a few moments we will be recalling the suffering and death of the same child whose birth we're celebrating. But on this day we affirm that we believe it is worth it, that it all has a point, that it is all, in the end, very good. Because God came to us at Christmas; He entered history and redeemed it by making it His story. And we know that God's story has no end, and as characters in His story, neither do we - God's story, after all, is the only story that really does have a 'happily ever after!"