

“May Christ be Born in You”  
The Rev. Lauren McDonald  
Hickory Neck Episcopal Church  
Christmas Day – December 25, 2009  
John 1:1-14

Merry Christmas! I’m a little embarrassed to admit this, but this is the first time I’ve ever been in church on Christmas morning. So I’ve certainly never heard a Christmas Day sermon, much less preached one. I’m glad all of you are here with me this morning to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Incarnation of our God.

It’s a little bit complicated this morning, isn’t it? Those who were here last night got to hear Luke’s version of the story with the angels and shepherds and the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. But on Christmas morning we get John’s version. I can remember the first time I fell in love with this passage. It was when I was in college at Sewanee. I was in the choir, and we sang a service of Advent Lessons and Carols each year. The final lesson of the service was always this prologue from the Gospel of John. My acting professor would climb up the stairs to the lectern and in his deep, booming bass voice read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” To me, it sounded like the voice of God. I loved listening to him read it. This powerful, poetic passage reverberated around the chapel, and it didn’t seem to matter to me what it meant because I just got caught up in the beauty of the words and the images. It’s easy for the poetry to lull us so that we don’t really hear the message, the good news, that the Word became flesh and lived among us.

Likewise, on Christmas Eve, it's easy to be lulled by the story of the baby in a manger and the sheep and the angels. We get caught up in the image of the child in the warm, snuggly stable with loving parents and wide-eyed shepherds and animals singing lullabies. We can forget that it was cold in that stable, and a feeding trough for animals is no place for an infant. We can forget that God's people were living under an oppressive regime, and it was a very frightening time. It is into a place of darkness and fear, of oppression and injustice that God took on flesh and became human, like us.

I think one of the reasons we distract ourselves with beautiful poetry or drummer boys and singing farm animals is because it's just so hard to conceive of God becoming human. We have to break down such a huge idea into images that we can understand. The Word became flesh and lived among us. God loved us so much that God was willing to take on our human limitations, to become a baby and then grow into a man, to experience in the flesh cold and hunger and anger and grief as well as joy and laughter and the physical touch of other human beings. God was willing to come and live with us in our darkness, to be the light shining forth, a beacon of hope that the power of sin cannot overcome. God came to be with us, as we are.

God is with those of us who are rejoicing this Christmas. God is with those of us who are sad or grieving. God is with those of us who are eagerly embracing family and friends and God is with those of us who find time with our families to be exhausting or frustrating. God is with those of us who have lost family members or friends and God is with those of us who are alone. No matter where we are or how we are feeling this Christmas, God is with us.

During Advent I've been reading a book by Sue Monk Kidd called, *When the Heart Waits*. In it she tells the story of being at a monastery at Christmastime. "Merry Christmas!" she calls out to one of the monks. "May Christ be born in you," he replies. The Word became flesh and lived among us. Here, two thousand years after Jesus was born, the Word is still becoming flesh and living among us.

Merry Christmas! May Christ be born in you this day and every day.