

SERMON
2nd Sunday of Christmas
January 3, 2010

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 1:1-18

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

It was late at night, and Heidi was home alone with her 3 year old daughter Katelyn. Heidi was well into in her ninth month of pregnancy when she started to go into labor. She called 911 knowing that it would not be wise for her to drive herself to the hospital.

However, due to a terrible storm and power outage at the time, only one paramedic was able to respond to the call. The house was very, very dark, so the paramedic asked little Katelyn to hold a flashlight high over her mommy so he could see while he helped deliver the baby.

Very diligently, Katelyn did as she was asked. Heidi pushed and pushed, and after a while, Connor was born.

The paramedic lifted him by his feet, and spanked him on his bottom. Connor began to cry. The paramedic then thanked Katelyn for her help, and asked the wide eyed 3 year old what she thought about what had just happened. Katelyn responded quickly; “Well, he shouldn’t have crawled in there in the first place. Spank him again.”

During this past Advent season we have heard a lot about pregnancy. We heard of Elizabeth becoming pregnant at an advanced age. She eventually gave birth to John, who we know as John the Baptist. Then we heard of a young woman named Mary who became pregnant in a miraculous way.

Of course all of this led up to Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of our Lord, Jesus, the Son of the living God. But what does it mean for God to be born? How can we comprehend the idea that the infinite became finite in human form?

Today, we get a glimpse from the Prologue to St. John's Gospel. No book in literature begins with such profound breath-taking words. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

A few years ago, Joan Osborne came out with a popular song that contained these lyrics:

"If God had a name, what would it be?
And would you call it to his face if you were faced with him
In all his glory? What would you ask
If you had just one question?
Yeah, yeah, God is great
Yeah, yeah, God is good
Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us?
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make his way home

This song was not played on many so called "Christian" radio stations, but it was quite popular on top 40 pop stations.

It's interesting to think about though, isn't it? What if God was one of us? Well, God did become one of us. It's called the incarnation. It's what St John talked about; "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Have you ever noticed that when people experience some sort of sudden tragedy or ongoing suffering, they often can become bitter? They tend to shut out the people who love them most – the people who are trying to help them. Perhaps you have known people like that.

You try to help them, but you receive a response like: "How would you know how it feels, you've never gone through what I have." Maybe they have a point.

It's hard to relate to someone else's experiences. As a Pastor, I try to be very careful of this. I try not to say; "I know how you feel" when in reality, I have never been in their shoes.

So, as caring Christians, can we really offer sympathy to someone in pain when we ourselves have never experienced that pain? I believe that it is possible, but it's much easier if you've been through it yourself.

In today's world, support groups of all kinds have become very popular. There are support groups for almost everything and everyone under the sun. There are support groups for: widows and widowers mourning the loss of their spouse.

There are support groups for cancer survivors, alcoholics, spouses and children of alcoholics, those who struggle with other addictions to things like food, drugs, sex, gambling or work. You name it, and there's a support group for it somewhere. So why is it that these support groups are so important anyway?

Well, primarily because the only person who is able to really reach an alcoholic is another alcoholic. They know the struggles firsthand, and can offer support that others cannot.

Most of you have probably never heard of the island of Molokai. It's located in the state of Hawaii and has an interesting history. You have to go way back to the late 1800's to understand its significance.

You see, back then, there was no cure for the highly contagious and deadly disease called leprosy. I've talked about this disease before and how it attacks the extremities of the body such as the ears, the toes, the nose, and the fingers. It's a horrible and dreadful disease which today is curable, but it wasn't back then.

So, in order to keep the disease at bay – in order to keep it from spreading and creating an epidemic, the government would send lepers to a colony on the island of Molokai. There, they would be secluded and isolated from those who were not infected with the disease.

Well, in 1873, there was a young, brave Catholic Priest named Father Damien who volunteered to spend his life serving the people secluded on the island of Molokai. When he arrived, he was startled to see people who were not only suffering physically, but also socially, emotionally and spiritually.

In the leper colony he saw extreme drunkenness, immorality, abuse, and an overall sense of hopelessness. What he saw were people who desperately needed to know the answer to a question we all ask... "where is God?" They needed to know God's presence in their lives. They needed to know that God had not abandoned them.

And so, in 1873, Father Damien lived among the 700 lepers. He knew the dangers. He knew the inevitable results of so much personal contact with the highly contagious disease. Even so, he built hospitals, clinics, churches, and some 600 coffins. And the whole while he was giving them the answer to that question... where is God?

And whenever a church service was held, he would stand up in front of the lepers, and he would warmly and lovingly address them as “my dear brethren.” But then one morning in 1885, at the age of 45, in a calm clear voice, instead of “my dear brethren,” Father Damien began with, “My fellow lepers, I am now one of you.”

You see, it was out of love that a humble priest became one of them. Out of love he gave those lepers a gift that would change their life for all eternity. He shared with them the answer to the ever present question... “Where is God?” And the only way he could truly give them the answer is by becoming one of them.

In a sense, that was the only way that God could restore his relationship with his people. God had to become one of us.

That way, we can never say; “But God, you don’t know what it’s like.” “You don’t know what it means to be tempted” “You don’t know what it’s like to be hungry and thirsty.” “You don’t know what it feels like when your friends betray you.” “You have no idea what it feels like to be made fun of and mocked.” “You don’t know what pain and suffering are all about.”

Before Jesus, we could say these things. But no longer. For God became human in the person of Jesus. What love is this, that God would do such a thing.

You see, sometimes words are not enough. Believe it or not, we humans can be stubborn. For God tried to convey his love for us through words.

Through the words of instruction to Adam and Eve in the garden – through the words of promise to Abraham and his descendants – through the words of the Ten Commandments given to Moses – through the words of the prophets, one after another. But we did not listen.

So today, we hear again the story of the Word becoming flesh. God has become one of us in order that we might know his love for us once and for all.

Going back to the story I told at the beginning. Little Katelyn was angry at her newborn brother for crawling in there in the first place. Perhaps we can say the same of God. God should have never come into the world as a human. After all, look what happened to him. Look at the humiliation and suffering he endured.

He should have just stayed in the heavens where it was safe. But we can be ever so thankful that God decided that we were worth it. For now we can know that there is light in the darkness of our lives. There is hope in our hopelessness. And we can be assured that we are loved. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.
Amen.

How many of you know what God looks like??

Maybe you can describe him or her? Have any of you ever seen God? We really don't know what God looks like, do we.

Sometimes it's kind of hard to believe in someone who you have never seen, right?

In our Bible story today, we heard that God became a human being and lived with us. Do you know who that person might be? *Jesus*

Now why do you think that God decided to become a human being? *One of the reasons is so that he could show us that he understands what it is like to be a person.*

When God came to earth as Jesus, he experienced all the things we do. Therefore, whenever we're sad or hurting or even happy, Jesus knows how we feel.

Do you know why this is? Because he loves us so much that he wanted to be with us in our good times and bad. He wanted to be like a light in the darkness. He wanted to help us feel loved and safe. He wanted to be the one who always understands us.

That's why we can always pray to Jesus. Let us pray..... Thank you for becoming one of us so that we can know your love. Help us to be examples of your love to all people. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.