

Clark's Corner 1211 – The Christmas Incarnation

One of the essential tenets of our Reformed Faith is what we call the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the belief that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, and that God “became flesh” when Jesus came to earth and was born of the virgin Mary. The Essential Tenets of our presbytery says that “Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God entered human history and became a real human being. He is truly the Word of God (John 1:1-3). Becoming human, Jesus was “all of God in a human body” (Col 1:19) and “God with us” (Matt 1:23)”. The Incarnation is a mystery that we do not fully understand.

In the early Christian era, there was considerable disagreement amongst Christians regarding the nature of Christ's Incarnation. While all Christians believed that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the exact nature of his Sonship was contested, together with the precise relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit referred to in the New Testament. Though Jesus was clearly the Son, what exactly did this mean? Debate on this subject raged most especially during the first four centuries of Christianity, involving Jewish Christians, Gnostics, followers of Arius, and followers of Athanasius, among others.

Eventually, the Christian Church accepted the teaching of Athanasius and his allies, that Christ was the incarnation of the eternal second person of the Trinity, who was truly God and truly human simultaneously. All divergent beliefs were defined as heresies. This included Docetism, which said that Jesus was a divine being that took on human appearance but not flesh; Arianism, which held that Christ was a created being; and Nestorianism, which maintained that the Son of God and the man, Jesus, shared the same body but retained two separate natures.

Our Presbyterian Book of Order, in F-2.03, says that “The confessions express the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in recognition of canonical Scriptures and the formulation and adoption of the ecumenical creeds, notably the Nicene and the Apostle's Creeds with their definitions of the mystery of the triune God and of the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in Jesus Christ.”

In *The Message*, Eugene Petersen translates John 1:14 as “The Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood.” In *The Missional Leader*, Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk write that “Missional leaders take the Incarnation of Jesus with the utmost seriousness. More than just a doctrine to be confessed, it is the key to understanding all God's activities with, through, in, and among us. It points toward an answer to the question of where God is to be found. In the Incarnation, we discern that God is always found in what appears to be the most godforsaken of places – the most inauspicious of locations, people, and situations. God seems to be present where there is little or no expectation.”

“An old man, past hope, keeps the light of the temple in Jerusalem. His wife is an embarrassment because she is far past the age of childbearing and there is no son. Yet God comes to these two elderly faithful people, and their world is transformed. A young girl, just a teenager, in an obscure village, becomes pregnant with the life of God. Over and over again,

God meets God's people with the bright light of the Kingdom in what appears to be the most hopeless and forsaken places."

"In these biblical narratives, God is constantly present in places where no one would logically expect God's future to emerge, and yet it does, over and over. There is nothing in these stories about getting the wrong people off the bus and getting the right ones on to accomplish great ends and become the best organization in the world. This God who pursues us is always calling the wrong people onto a bus that isn't expected to arrive. The reason for all of this is that God chooses to unfold the future of the kingdom among people and places of this kind."

"In the Jewish Scriptures, the prophet Ezekiel asks, 'Can these bones live?' In reality the question isn't answered until Jesus appears as the one who is God's enfleshed presence among people. God's answer to the question is God himself: Jesus the Incarnate Lord, who comes among us in the most unexpected and inauspicious times and places. The Biblical stories that lead to the Incarnation keep telling us these are the very places where God's future emerges. This is what God does and how God acts, most clearly in Jesus."

Throughout our Christian history, the Incarnation has been, and continues to be, central to our celebration of Christmas. In Jesus, God took on flesh, moved into our neighborhood, and lived among us. As followers of Christ, we are invited to be the presence of Christ with the neighbors God has put around us. What does this practically mean to live incarnationally in neighborhoods where people are poor, hungry, and hurting? What is God up to and how are we being invited to participate in God's work during this Advent/Christmas season? Where will Jesus show up this year? It may be in a place where you have no hope or in a place that you do not expect. That would be just like God.