

Christmas Day, December 25, 2008, Year B

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

"God Took On Flesh – It's Personal!"

One night a man decided to show his wife how much he loved her. After dinner he began to recite romantic poetry, telling her he would climb high mountains to be near her, swim wide oceans, cross deserts in the burning heat of day, and even sit at her window and sing love songs to her in the moonlight. She listened to him go on for some time about this immense love he had – and she ended the conversation with just one question: "But will you wash the dishes for me?"

Just how much will one person do for another? A very telling question indeed! It probably depends on who is doing for whom, and then again there is the very important WHY. Many times what we do for another is conditional – there are terms and quite often a repayment of the favor. I think that is why so many people have a difficult time believing that God would actually send His Son to become a human being. I mean, think about it – why would God lower Himself to hurt, be hungry and all that goes with being a human – and not want something in return? Well, that's wrong thinking, totally wrong. God doesn't want anything in return, except for us to love Him – and turn our lives toward Him as Lord.

Two brothers – Kevin and Ryan - ages five and three, were waiting for breakfast one Saturday morning. Their mother was preparing pancakes – and they began to argue rather loudly over who would get the first one off the griddle. Well, Mom was not one to pass up an opportunity to teach them a moral lesson – so she told them that if Jesus were sitting here – He would say: "Let my brother have the first pancake – I can wait!" Kevin immediately turned to his younger brother and said "OK Ryan, you be Jesus."

There is only one Jesus, and no one could ever take His place – but instead He took ours! In today's Old Testament lesson – the Prophet Isaiah boldly foretells of the special birth that would take place when Jesus became human – and the result of that sacrifice. *"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore."* This would be no normal child – but a king -the King of Kings! Now there are some in the Christian Community, who question the validity of these claims – or even the truth of His birth – which we heard about in today's Gospel of Luke.

Let me share with you some insight into God's plan. Many years before Jesus was born – He chose a city – the City of David – as prophesied by Isaiah as the birthplace of His Son. The city called Bet Lechem – or as we know it Bethlehem. Bet means "House of" and Lechem means "bread." The One who would call Himself the "Bread of Life" would be born in a city called "The House of Bread" – Bethlehem. God knew – long before and prepared for His birth.

The Apostle Peter validates the truth about Jesus and His divinity – when he wrote these powerful words taken from 2 Peter 1:16-18. *"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased "-- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven*

Christmas Day, December 25, 2008, Year B

when we were with Him on the holy mountain.” Eyewitnesses affirm the truth that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and that He was born from the Virgin Mary. The Apostle John begins his epistle with these words – as an eyewitness to the events of the life of Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:1-3 *“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”* When Jesus proclaimed in John 14:6 that He was *“the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me”* He was validating all of the prophecies and the fact that mankind’s need for a savior was now fulfilled. This is no myth or urban legend – no, my friends this is truth – and on that you can be certain!

That special night in Bethlehem, the angel of the Lord appeared and proclaimed to the shepherds: *“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2:10-11) The word Savior means to rescue one from harm or danger and most dictionaries on the web point to Jesus Christ. Today we celebrate His birth – an awesome miracle in itself!

In one of the earlier editions of “America’s Funniest Home Videos” there was a segment from a Japanese version of the show. The segment showed a brother and a sister coming to a break in the sidewalk. There was a long step across – and the gap was about two feet. The boy made it across quite easily – with a generous leap, but his sister was really terrified and she refused to even attempt it. The boy tried hard to convince her to give it a try – but the answer was still a profound NO! So what did the boy do? He stretched out across the gap, forming a human bridge with his body. His sister crawled across the span – secured by her brother’s sacrifice. How far would any of us go for a sister or brother in need?

Two thousand years ago – God stepped into history – by taking on human flesh, in the form of His Son – Jesus Christ. My friends – what God did in Bethlehem was personal; for each one of us. Fr. Ward has said many times that everyone loves the baby in the manger, but when you start to talk about the cross – they steer clear. I believe you cannot look at the baby in the manger without looking forward to the immense sacrifice that Jesus made – giving of Himself – to pay the price for us – in our place. It truly is personal!

Just yesterday I was driving to church and a Christmas song came on the radio. It is by a contemporary Christian Group “Downhere” – and the song is called “How Many Kings.” It is very fitting for today’s Gospel and today message. It contains a series of questions that will most certainly cause you to think.

*‘Cause how many kings, stepped down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
How many Gods have poured out their hearts;
To romance a world that has torn all apart?
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?
Only one did that for me!*

Christmas Day, December 25, 2008, Year B

We are all familiar with the words spoken by Jesus in John 3:16. I want to leave you with a special, personal Christmas gift; to see this Scripture as a personal gift from God to you. Repeat after me: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*" I do believe that you cannot read verse 16 without verse 17: "*For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*" Now, the gift – take John 3:16 and remove the generic words – so that it says "*For God so loved me that He gave His only begotten Son, that if I believe in Him I shall not perish, but I will have eternal life.*" What a precious, personal gift from a precious, personal savior!