*The Life of the World*

Christmas Eve Homily

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Most often, on Christmas Eve we hear the Christmas story from the Gospels of Matthew or Luke. In these gospels we hear the enduring stories of the conception, birth, and early life of our Lord Jesus. These stories resonate with us because they emphasize the humanity of Him who was sent to live among us and to bring salvation to a troubled world. Tonight, we hear a different story from the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of John, we hear a story that was important to the members of the Johannine church, a story of faith that has shaped our understanding of the incarnate Son of God.

For the members of the Johannine church, it was important to understand the cosmic dimensions of the Christ story. This story tells us of God who dwells eternally beyond time and space and who chose to enter the temporal world of humanity as the incarnate Word. John’s story begins beyond time and history and joins this with the story of the incarnate Son who came to live among us as the human being Jesus of Nazareth.

For the community of the faithful, their experience of Jesus was that of a personal relationship with God. For them, God was not distant, remote, and isolated. In Jesus, God Almighty chose to live with them, in the midst of human weakness, confusion, and pain. The incarnate Word who dwelt with God now dwells with them as a human being among human beings. The Word had not just come down to earth to work His will, he came to live among them. It is the story of the Word’s actions in creation and human history.

While God has been with humanity since the beginning, the birth of the incarnate Word as a human being was a decisive moment not only for human history, but for the history of creation. In that moment, God’s relationship to humanity and humanity’s relationship to God changed in an amazing and extraordinary way. Humanity was gifted to see, hear, and know God in ways not previously possible. For those who believed in Jesus, there was now a personal and distinctively human relationship. More than that, they were given the power to become children of God. Their hopes now were based on what they could know, see, and hear.

How can our hopes be based on knowing, seeing, and hearing something that happened almost 2000 years ago? Few of the people of the Johannine community were eyewitnesses to the Christ event. Their belief was based on faith in the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses and faith in the revelation of God in Christ. Their knowing, seeing, and hearing was through God’s gift of faith, faith in the belief that Jesus was not just a man, but the eternal Word of God made flesh. Their faith was in the ongoing, life-giving work of the Word.

The Word is the light which enlightens all people and in Jesus the light entered the world. Those who through faith receive the incarnate Word into their lives become a new people, children of God Most High. Like those who have gone before us, we are given a life that does not depend on temporal events, but a life that depends on faith. Instead of a manger, angels, and magi, John gives us a vision of the difference the incarnate Word makes in the life of the world.

When we see Jesus, we see God. When we hear Jesus, we hear God. When we know Jesus, we know God. Tonight, we celebrate more than the birth of a child, we celebrate the event that changed the creation.