

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Christmas  
Text: John 1: 1-18

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.  
January 3,  
2010

Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

### “Knowing What God *Wants* Us To Know”

It is said that King Charles V, the king of Scotland, many years ago, wondered what life was like for the people of his kingdom. In a desire to get to know them better and to more effectively govern them, he would occasionally exchange his royal robes for common clothes and walk from his lofty palace into the soiled streets. Completely disguised as a commoner, he walked through the market place, worked in the fields and ate at the tables of the peasant people.

All of that was done by King Charles in an attempt to better understand and more fully identify with the people of his kingdom. But what he did partially and imperfectly, God did completely and perfectly. In Jesus Christ, God became human and lived on this earth. He did not come to learn more about us and to identify with us. He came to help us know and identify with Him.

The announcement of the birth of our Lord was really quite short and simple. "... To you is born this day ... a savior ..." Did you hear it? Really hear it? To YOU is born this day a Savior. This day is what it says. It was not, "Once upon a time," nor was it "Someday over the rainbow," but the message is clear, "This day!" Everyday! Yesterday! Tomorrow and the day after! and especially Christmas day. This day God's love comes seeking to be born in OUR lives. The message of Christmas is a *now* message and it is a personal message from God to us. It is a message of Good News. "... to you is born this day ... a Savior who is Christ the Lord," it is our message and when we hear it, really hear it, it is Christmas Now!

I hear many people say, "It's New Year's - Christmas is over!" The SEASON of Christmas goes to the 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas - EPIPHANY! That's when the theme changes from emphasizing God's gift TO us - to the light of Christ shining THROUGH us. The Word became Flesh and dwelt among US! Up until this point no one has really seen God. Visions - messages in dreams - Prophecies - but actually knowing first hand about God, that had never happened until Christmas. John says in today's Gospel: "No one has ever *seen* God. It is God the *only Son*, who is close to the Father's heart, who has *made him known*."

This is a wonderful thing. But we need to be careful, because some people now think they know everything there is to know about God. We only know about God what God wants us to know. So what do we know about who God is? Like the disciples, we are left to ask, "Who is this, that wind and sea obey him? Who is this who feeds the multitude on a couple of loaves and a few fish?" But in the Gospel of John, there's never a doubt who Jesus is, because he tells us. Usually he does so with a statement that begins with the words, "I am." Put him in a situation and he will clarify who he is and what he has come to do. You can put him in the desert surrounded by people who are unsatisfied, and Jesus says, "I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." You can put him in the midst of people who are confused, people who ask, "Who are you, Jesus? What makes you different from all the other gurus, rabbis, and religious leaders?" And Jesus says, "I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." You can put him at graveside, in the midst of grief-stricken people, and Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live." Or put him in the midst of people who feel disconnected by life's difficulties, and Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." In the Gospel of John, in one situation after another, Jesus defines himself and says, "This is who I am...." Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." This is the kind of thing we might expect to hear in these days after Christmas.

Not long ago we gathered on Christmas Eve to hear the prophet Isaiah say, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." We don't know if old Isaiah had any idea who or what he was talking about, yet we celebrate Christmas as a festival of light. We string up twinkle lights on fir trees. We illumine our houses. We burn candles in the windows and plug in GE bulbs on the shrubbery. We burn up the kilowatts because Jesus Christ is born. In the bleak midwinter, why not shine a little light? I AM - the Light. I AM - the Vine. I AM - the Resurrection. I AM the Gate. I AM - the Bread of Life. I AM the Word become Flesh. THAT is what Jesus is!

In the same mysterious way that God became flesh and entered the world in Jesus, we Lutherans believe that our Lord comes into our midst and into our lives in Holy Communion. We believe that Christ is really present "in, with, and under" these elements of bread and wine. What God did in a cosmic sense on the first Christmas by coming into the World, he does in an individual sense in Holy Communion by coming to you and me! And in the same way that the two natures of Christ were inseparable, the body and blood of Christ are inseparable from the bread and wine. We don't believe we can look at the bread under a microscope and see molecules of Christ's flesh. We don't believe that the wine actually changes into Christ's blood once the words are said. But we do believe that Christ is present in Holy Communion.

Martin Luther wrote: "We are not so mad as to believe that Christ's body is in the bread in a manner as crude and visible as bread is in a basket or wine in a cup.... We do, however, unhesitatingly believe that His body is there, as His words 'This is my body' indicate.... He is where the bread is ..." We believe that Christ is really present when we eat the bread and drink the wine of Holy Communion. This is not something we can explain but something we can experience. As far as HOW this happens - we only know what God WANTS us to know.

He comes to each of us individually and personally. *For to YOU* is born a Savior. Christ is present to relieve our hearts of the tremendous load of guilt for which we need forgiveness. The Lord is present to strengthen us to overcome our temptations and weaknesses. He is present to lift from our shoulders

the weight of our worries and fears. Jesus is present to assure us that no matter what has happened or will happen, we will be all right because he is always with us, from that first Christmas when we heard for to YOU is born a Savior, until a few minutes from now when you will hear the words, "This is my body - given for YOU."

It's true that we only know what God *wants* us to know - but knowing that God loves us and gave himself for US - that's all we *need* to know. Amen