

CHRISTMAS, 2019

Each Christmas, we listen to the story—a simple story, the details of which we know well: Caesar’s decree, a census: Joseph and pregnant Mary journey to Bethlehem, the City of David; no room in the inn; shepherds; a newborn baby lying in a manger; a new beginning in the midst of tyranny, greeted with great joy by angels and the shepherds. No matter how old we are or how many times we’ve heard the story, we never tire of it, each year it springs forth new bringing us hope and joy.

This story is a defining narrative for all of human history; it shapes the way we see God and ourselves. God our deepest longing, is present in it. What does the birth of Jesus, the conjoining of God and human flesh, the incarnation, tell us about God?

A kindergarten teacher invited the children in her class to draw a picture. It could be of anything they had heard or learned in their religion lesson that day. As the children drew, the teacher walked from desk to desk, noting everything. She stopped beside one little girl who was working especially intently, and asked, “What are you drawing?” The child replied, “I’m drawing God.” The teacher smiled and said, “But Sophie, no one knows what God looks like.” Without skipping a beat, the girl without looking up, answered, “Well, now they will!”

The Author of life and all creation shows us in Jesus the face of God. It’s not just a sketch, but a full immersion into human existence. God the Word, wanting to speak a word of boundless love, takes on human flesh. And when in Jesus we see God’s face, it isn’t what we are expecting to see. God doesn’t appear in the grand halls of a royal palace, but in the barrenness of a god-forsaken place where homeless people take shelter—a stable, a barn—a child born not in pomp, wealth, privilege, but into a broken world in simplicity, vulnerability and utter poverty—in a word—smallness.

Smallness holds the key for us in recognizing God’s revelation in Jesus. Early Church fathers used an interesting phrase to speak of the incarnation; they said that in Jesus the eternal Word becomes “abbreviated,” small enough to fit in a manger/cradle, so that we might see with

our eyes and touch with our hands the mystery of God. Here is God who abandons heavenly glory and empties himself in smallness so that we need not fear to approach him and so have life, life in its fullness (Jn. 10:10). In the incarnation, we learn that God is willing to go to any lengths in search of us; the All-Powerful becomes all-fragile; the “Ancient of Days” is crafted and carried in a human mother’s womb; the author of existence is born in a manger; the “Master of the Universe” is swaddled in linen cloth and laid in the arms of his mother.

This Christmas I invite all of us to journey inward, to that part or parts of our life that are the weakest and most vulnerable, those we attempt, or do, hide from others and, quite likely, ourselves, that part or parts of our lives wrapped in darkness, hopelessness and/or despair and there, encounter the light of God in Jesus flickering like a small candle bidding us come near to his light and warmth, a little child in smallness who reaches out his arms and hands in invitation to us to embrace us and we, him, to allow him to soothe and quiet our fears, without question, in forgiveness and love.

This Christmas I invite all of us to look in a mirror and see reflected back to us the face of God--Jesus drawn in you, in me, in every person.

“Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning,
Jesus to thee all glory be giv’n;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;
O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him,
Christ, the Lord!

*Christmas!
Blessings!
25 December 2019
Father Jim Sirona*