

Second Sunday after Christmas, Year A: January 2, 2010

Right now, there are babies being born and laughing and crying all over the world, and there are parents listening for their wordless cries and understanding them. After a few days or weeks of listening intently, caring for the newborn, simply being with the baby, parents learn to distinguish between the cry that means "I'm hungry -- feed me NOW!" and the one that says, "Pick me up and hold me; I need to know I'm safe and warm." Parents learn to tell the difference between the cry that means the baby is simply bored and restless and fretful and the cry that means they're in real pain. And parents learn -- and sometimes learn to dread -- the sound of a baby with a diaper in serious need of changing! Later on, after parents have mastered the rudiments of crying language, the baby begins to laugh -- and parents soon learn to know just what is causing the baby's mirth, as well as what causes the cries. This is a language without words, but a language nonetheless!

"Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son," says the writer of Hebrews.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us," says the Gospel of John. In fact, the divine Word became a child, newborn, fragile, and vulnerable. In the birth of Jesus, God reveals God's own self and the divine plan for salvation -- and it turns out to depend on human beings! This God, who is all-powerful, who could simply destroy the world and start over again, will not. This God, who could demand our obedience, does not. This God loves us so much that all that power is used to make *us* -- fragile, willful human beings -- God's partners in our own salvation.

God sends the Son into the world as an infant, dependent upon Mary and Joseph for his very survival. God sends the Son to be cared for, protected, listened to -- by us. Mary and Joseph are entrusted with this precious baby's life, and through his laughs and cries, they begin a lifetime relationship with Jesus.

It goes against all our worldly logic to imagine God as dependent upon us, human beings -- or anything else, for that matter. Isn't it supposed to be the very definition of God that God is all-powerful, needs nobody else, is totally self-sufficient? How could God depend on us?

This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing. Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.

But how else do we explain this child given to the world?
Christmas is a story about all of us receiving that which we most want and need:
love -- deep, strong, unconditional love.
That love is then placed in our care, dependent upon us to nurture it.
Christmas is the story of how God's Kingdom enters *our* lives.
We tell the story not only in words,
but in the language that is beyond words: by how we live.

God asks us, like Joseph and Mary, to learn to listen for and understand
the unspoken cries of all who need our care:
the sick and the needy, those at the margins, creation itself.
And once we listen and understand, learn to distinguish among the cries,
we are called to respond in love,
to share the abundant joy that also comes to birth in this child.
The Gospel proclaims that "The Word became flesh and lived among us."
Mary and Joseph made a loving home for the Word, for Jesus.
Will we? Will we invite the person of Jesus into our lives,
finding new life in *our* relationship with him?
Will we care for that presence,
listen to him crying, love him as our brother?

The Word became flesh and lives among us.
He is in our world now, today, and will be tomorrow,
and in the New Year and beyond.
He is with us even in the middle of summer,
when Christmas day seems forever away.

May each day be Christmas,
and may we tell the story by our word and our example each day:
the story of how we cared for the presence of Christ entrusted to us,
by caring for each other and for ourselves,
as we listen to the cries and laughter,
and love as we have been loved.
May Christmas not be identified only with the Christ Child, the Word,
but with all of us, as we risk ourselves to love and be loved,
even as God does in this blessed Son,
born to bring us love in the world this day and always.

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