

Christmas Day—Year B
Isaiah 52:7-10
Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12)
John 1:1-14

Last night was glorious! The joy of little **angels** and an exuberent **Mary** and a very loyal **Joseph** and passionate **sheep** and **cows** and very responsible **shepherds** and **wise, wise people**, and a proclamation of “**FEAR NOT!**” by the **head angel** that could not be contained—it was more than the heart could hold. And the **majesty of choirs** and the **scent of mystery** that still lingers this morning. The throngs of people who come out on a cold and stormy winter’s night to make their way to the **manger**, who come to **gaze** and **adore** and **pay homage**, who come to answer some **longing in their hearts** that they don’t even have *words* for. It’s more than the mind can fathom.

Which is why we need this morning.

We can’t take in the fullness of *last night* in one fell swoop because it’s *not* just about the **birth of a baby**; it’s *not just about* the **Feast of the Nativity**. This truth is bigger, so much bigger. *Today*, we celebrate the **Feast of the Incarnation**—*God in our flesh, God with us, God in us*.

Last night, we focus on *how* **God enters our flesh**, the unfathomable reality that **God enters our flesh** in absolute *solidarity* with *powerlessness* and *absolute vulnerability*, literally **placing Godself** in *our hands* to nurture and care for and love.

Last night, we focus on *how* **God enters our flesh**, but *this morning*, like turning a diamond to catch the light refracting in a slightly different way, *this morning*, we focus on *another* aspect of this truth that is beyond our ability to comprehend—*this morning* isn’t about *how*, this morning is about *that*—*that* **God enters our flesh**—this morning is about **the union of divinity with humanity**.

This *isn’t* about *gazing upon a holy child* who is *other* than *ourselves*; this is about understanding that **we, we are holy, radiant, filled with the glory of God**. This is about understanding that the **Word that was in the beginning**, the **Word who has always been with God**, the **Word who is God**, this is about understanding that *this* **Word** who sets all **creation in motion, breathing divine breath** into everything, *this* **Word has been made flesh** and *our flesh* will never be the same.

We are *walking, talking, breathing, loving, glorious windows* into the Divine. How are we *speaking this divinity* in *our flesh*? How is it *taking shape* in *our words*? How is it *taking shape* in *our actions*? How is it *taking up residence* in the **flesh-and-blood realities** of *our lives*? Can you imagine what would change if we all came to terms with the fact that *we* are **the Incarnate Word of God, spoken by God to heal this world and make it new?**

If we only celebrate the birth of the holy child, then we fail to see why *this* birth is good news for *all flesh*, for *all* the **world**, for *all* of **creation**. On *this day*, God proclaims that, as is often said, *that matter matters*. **Material creation holds divinity in its essence**. If we look upon *one another* and *see God*, if we look *upon creation* and *see the Divine Power* that gave birth to it, EVERYTHING changes because the *only* response to seeing such **divine glory** is *sheer and utter REVERENCE*.

And so, on this *quiet Christmas morn*, we fall silent, mute with awe. **The Word was made flesh** because *some truths* cannot be captured and articulated in our limited language, but only *loved* and *embraced* with a mystic's heart.

Brother David Steindal-Rast puts it this way:

The mystic is not a special human being; every human being is a special kind of mystic, and that never was around, that particular kind of mystic that you can be because you're *unique*. Never has anybody brought the talents *and* also the shortcomings that also belongs to you, and that goes very closely together with what I mean when I say "mystery." It's not something mysterious when I say this Great Mystery, this Divine Mystery that we're confronted with. And in mysticism, experience—that is something that we *cannot grasp*, we *cannot put it in words*, we *cannot imagine it in an image*, we *cannot put it in a concept*, we *cannot grasp it*, but we can *understand* it. There's a great difference between *grasping* and *understanding*, and you *understand* it by *being grasped*—it *does something to you*.

And many people *experience* it on a different level with *music*—you *understand* music, but you *can't grasp* music. And you *can't even talk about it* because you have *no words and concepts*, but you can *understand* it when you *allow it to take hold of you*, and you *give yourself to the music*. And that Great Mystery, you might call it life or God or whatever, that Great Mystery with which all human beings are *always* confronted, and that we *cannot also grasp*, obviously, but we can *understand by allowing it to do something to us*, and that *openness is simply silent*, [that *openness*] can be *totally silent*."

This Word made flesh *cannot be grasped*; you can only *be grasped by it*, you can only *allow it to take hold of you* and *give yourself to it with silent openness*.

Your human flesh has been filled with the glory of God. In a day and time when *words* themselves have become *weapons of choice*, let this **Word be spoken**, *not only with your lips but with your lives*.

We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. As you *gaze upon this world that God so loves*, *see that glory in every eye you meet*, and **know** that *the eyes that meet yours are seeing that glory shining right back at them through your gaze*.

Risk the intimacy of being caught up in the divine gaze. In every human encounter, **God is gazing upon God**, and God couldn't be more in love.

Behold who you are, behold who we all are, behold that glory, and you'll understand why **all of creation can't help but clap their hands and ring out with joy**. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Boone, NC
December 25, 2017