

Sermon for Christmas 2017

“God is love”, wrote John in his first letter.

He continues, “God’s love was revealed among us in this way.

God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.”

And that my friends, in the spirit of faith, is the wonder of Christmas.

God wanted us so much to know his love – so that we too might love and live in love, that he came in the son to show us the way, first hand.

We all know I’m sure, that when we need to learn something important, something that will affect our wellbeing – our very life’ growth, being shown the way by a friend or companion is much better than reading a manual.

The celebration of Christmas is about the birth of the baby who was to do just this. Show us the presence of God’s love in our lives and the way we are to respond to it with the way we live our lives.

The birth of Jesus written about in the gospels of Matthew and Luke relate the mystery and wonder of the story at the beginning of our faith in two different ways, and in our Christmas nativity plays we usually combine both stories.

Matthew gives a picture wherein Joseph and Mary live at Bethlehem and have a home there, and it is understood that the author was originally writing to Jewish Christians still in the “home” faith. His charge, in his version of the nativity, is to hold trust and courage and to “begin anew” no matter what.

Luke, on the other hand, was writing to early believers who felt as though they had been cast out onto a lonely road, and were surrounded by predators. The baby wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, is a great metaphor for the newly “birthed” communities who are equally held securely by the divine truths of their faith.

Both gospels agree upon, and try in their own respective way to teach, that Jesus was both human and divine, traced genealogically through Joseph through the house of David and conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. This dual identity, enabled Jesus to experience and feel human suffering and joy, in the power and compassion of divine love.

In both gospel birth stories, the identity of Jesus was quickly shared with others.

In Matthew the revelation given to Joseph in God’s plan is made known to the Gentile magi.

In Luke the revelation given to Mary in God’s plan, is made known to the Jewish shepherds.

The message here for us, is that Christ’s identity is never received to be kept a private possession - it is instead to be shared with others.

The Christmas story, that God has come into the world through the birth of the baby in the manger, has been received and understood down through the ages in many different ways.

One understanding held by contemporary theologian and contemplative, James Finley,¹ that I recently heard, touched me by its simplicity and I would like to share it with you.

Finley believes that the message the birth stories teach us, is that there is no stopping God from showing us the power of his love in a very personal way.

The fact that there was *no room in the inn* didn't stop God from being born into this world. He came anyway. And this is always true.

What is going on in the world – the conflicts, the horrors, the way we as human beings treat each other – it seems there is never any *room in the inn* – that is, there is no stopping it, or no rest from the pace, yet we know in the spirit of faith that as true as that might be, God comes anyway.

God is constantly being born to our life.

It is also true sometimes in our own lives – that there is no room in the inn – that our lives are all filled up with the complexity of life – but God comes anyway. He is always being born in our hearts.

Yet, Finley teaches us, that in order to discover this, we have to leave the hurly burly of the inn – the superficiality of it all – the clatter of it all - and find our way back to the stable.

We have to enter into the humility, the simplicity and patience, the dependence of the baby and the delicate nature of our heart to discover where God is being born in our life and bring it out into the world and share it with people.

This is the message of Christmas. There may be *no room in the inn*, but God comes anyway. Being present for the birth, being ready to attend the birth, is what we are called to be and to do.

May we take the time this Christmas and in the year ahead, to be in the stable, and may we be ready to share the revelation of the birth in us that we receive.

Merry Christmas everyone.

The Lord be with you.

¹ An Advent Meditation with James Finley.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=james+finley+meditation+youtube&qs=AS&cvid=dbe823820c2a49e586fea8ce6ab0ce20&cc=AU&setlang=en-US&ru=%2fsearch%3fq%3djames%2bfinley%2bmeditation%2byoutube%26form%3dEDGHPT%26qs%3dAS%26cvid%3ddb823820c2a49e586fea8ce6ab0ce20%26cc%3dAU%26setlang%3den-US&view=detail&mmscn=vwrc&mid=3DA3A77ABCBF8EAE0ABB3DA3A77ABCBF8EAE0ABB&FORM=WRVORC>