

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The calendar tells us that, in the Roman Julian year, it is January 3. Happy and Blessed New Year to all. But, it is also still Christmas here....inside our church and inside our hearts.

We see it around us in subtle ways. As with last Sunday, the First Sunday after Christmas, we are still singing the old familiar Christmas carols that most of the world stopped hearing days ago. The nave is still decorated with the greens of the season. The altar still celebrates this special, glorious time with our festival white vestments. And our liturgy still continues with all of those unique, little remembrances of collect, and prayer, and response....all of it, all prolonging the joyous celebration of the Christ Mass with the company of Angels, and Archangels, and all the company of heaven!

But, I ask you rhetorically, "What, in today's gospel reading from St. John the Evangelist, makes the same glorious reference to the Christmas story?"

You may notice that we always focus on the gospel reading for the sermon..because, frankly, as ordained clergy, we are duty bound to preach the Gospel. Of course, culturally...in the world outside of these doors...there seems to be a clear anomaly with the focus of our gospel focus today.

As I stated earlier: we go to great lengths to contradict the modern-day image that Christmas is a "25th and out" event. How could you think any differently in today's world? It is all around us outside. The used boxes and bows and wrapping are all in the trash. The trees either come down and go into storage or out on the curb starting the next day. We get blitzed on television or in the newspaper about "After Christmas Sales". Go to Wal-Mart to stock up on Christmas cards for next year, and you will find the shelves picked as clean as a turkey carcass. The world cannot wait to move its materialistic frenzy onto the next marketing "big thing". What is that? Valentine's Day? Spoiler here...I was in Walmart the other day and yes...the Valentine's Day chocolate boxes are out in force!!

Yet, in the great effort of the church to get us to slow down...to keep us **HERE**...in the eternal and sacramental celebration of the Christ Mass...of God coming to be with us...we center on the very first words, the opening lines, of the Gospel according to John. And we wonder what is the connection with this season.

John's gospel has no nativity story, no animals in the barn, no shepherds and angels. Instead, it presents us with this hymn. A hymn to Christ. It is a love song, full of increasing light, celebrating the relationship between God and God's only child, and then extending that intimate relationship to embrace all humankind. These are powerful words that speak to us about the one who comes to us in power to

make all things new for us....we who, without him, are the exiles, the inhabitants of darkness.

Who is this Jesus, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us?

If we see only the baby lying in the manger, we only see part of the picture. Just as we did not celebrate Advent by pretending that Christ has not come, so we do not celebrate Christmas by pretending we do not know what is going to happen to this child.

Christmas does not stand alone. It cannot be celebrated properly in isolation from the whole story of Jesus as the Christ. To separate the story of his birth from the harsh reality of his crucifixion is to be in denial. The whole story of him, from beginning to end, reminds us that we must also see Jesus as the one who is not received.

The very people who hoped, finally got the one for whom they hoped....but they did not recognize him and so rejected him. We really do not understand the nature of God, and it causes so much denial. Instead of some Marvel comics superhero, God comes to us as one who is weak and vulnerable, not just as the holy infant but also as the adult hanging on the cross. Yet Jesus, the weak, flesh-and-bone one, has real power. Of course, not the power of the world. Not the power to make things right or prosperous. That is why it continues to be rejected by the world. His power is to let us be, to encourage us to be, indeed even level the way to allow us to be who we are created to be...the very children of God.

The coming of Jesus presents us with a choice. We can be transformed to be the people of God, walking in the vulnerable ways of God...of peace within, and of love for all. Or, we can reject him and continue business as usual...sitting in the darkness, shielding our eyes, turning away from the life-giving light. The story today is one of transforming hope for a new life. We are invited to cooperate with the divine initiative, to let the light enable us to see the path more clearly, to make a new beginning as the people of God. When that happens, heaven and earth **do** sing. There **is** joy to the world. The church gives us not one day, but twelve, to celebrate the birth of Christ, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Join with me in taking that time. Do not be overwhelmed or tired by the cultural rush to move on.

In repeating the close of last Sunday's sermon, we will continue to take the time God blesses us with, to look for ways to be transformed by God for God. To walk those vulnerable pathways of God, but in the company and love and support of each other. To persevere in hope and joy...not to be abandoned like Christmas trees discarded right after Christmas Day. For the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, so that we might see his glory and come into the loving presence of God, full of grace and truth revealed to us as the name of the Father, and as the Son and as the Holy Spirit. Amen.