

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

In the illustration of the gospel message today, we are going to do something a little different.

And we are going to ask _____ to tell us something about _____

Excellent. Thank you.

And, by now, you may wonder what all this has to do with the gospel message this morning.

There was the initial nervousness to be expected upon addressing a crowd through public speaking....but did you notice the joy, the pleasure in the voice and the demeanor? Did you catch the eagerness to tell that story?

Why is that?

I think it is a most natural instinct of our species, something that is born and contained within us.

As a species, need to communicate with each other....with good news or bad.

When someone you really do not know comes up to you in passing and says, matter of factly, "Hi, how are you?"....are not there times when you wish that they really and truly meant, in the heart of hearts, to hear your story as to how you are? You expect that from your loved ones, your family, your neighbors, your co-workers, your fellow parishioners...when they ask, "How are you?", you are more inclined to think that they really want to know, and so you spend a few opening sentences into conversation about....how you are. And, in return, you ask...in a relatively genuine way...how they are, expecting to take some time, in genuine concern, to have that return discussion.

Why? Because, again, innate within us in the DNA of our species, we look forward to communication with each other. And, more importantly, we do that in the framework of relationship.

Relationship.

If we have a relationship with our listener, we have a real conversation. One with meaning and substance, even though it may be brief. If we do NOT have a meaningful relationship with our listener, then...well...we go through the motions of answering the "how are you?" with an answer of "ok", or "not too bad", and let it go at that...because, outside of a real relationship, we do not expect anything more.

Does any of that make sense in your life experience?

Sure it does. And we long for those occasions when we can give and take our personal stories with someone who cares to be part of it....just like the tellers this morning. Sure, they get excited and delighted to tell their story because it means so much, and their lives and hearts are bound up with what was shared.

But they are also excited and delighted because of a real expectation that we, as a parish, care to hear about it all. In a sub-conscious way, they are excited and delighted because we, as the hearers of

this story, have crossed that line...and are in a substantive relationship with them.

Is any of this a surprise this morning?

We are constantly reminded...and reminding...that as humans, and as Christians, we are made in the very image of God. So much of what we know as good, in ourselves and in the world around us, helps us...or should help us to understand who God is, and what God wants for us. Today's gospel message from St. John can come to us with far greater understanding and clarity if we look at the world around us...and see and hear it in something as simple as the sharing with us this morning.

Let us listen once more to the words of this beloved carol: "What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?"

That is the question, alright...what child IS this? What do we know about this baby Jesus, born so long ago in the little village of Bethlehem? And what difference does it make to us today? Mark's gospel says nothing about the birth of Jesus, and the birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke tell us little about the child himself. If you want to get the big picture, the best place to look is in the prologue to the Gospel of John. Right from the get go, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (John 1:1) Long before the child we now know as Jesus of Nazareth came into this world, he lived in perfect union with God. We continue to celebrate his birth from just a few days ago...here he is, yet another baby. But John's gospel tells us that he was with God; he *was* God...a mystery we cannot explain, except to say that it was through him that the universe, as we know it, was created. When it comes to the birth of Jesus, it is putting it mildly to say he was no ordinary child. He was unique and unlike any other child who came before him or who has come into the world since.

For John, Jesus did not just start at Christmas. Jesus has always been. "In the beginning..." before there were houses, or roads, before there even was a Bethlehem, Jesus was with God. In fact, he was the Living Word of God, and he helped create the world...in the beginning...before anything else existed.

What does this mean? Why, we wonder?

No one really knows. But my spirit is comfortable with an understanding built around the Trinity, around an understanding within the experience that we shared this morning. Let us try it in this way.

God has a story to tell. It is the story of creation, the story of life, the story of all things...then, and now, and forever to come. It is a story that exceeds all time, and space...and it is both as old and as new as possible, both at the same time.

And we exist for one reason....and that is so that God can have more than a "Hi, How are you?" relationship with us. It is so that we can hear that story...as it was, and is, and will ever be told. But God wants....and needs...for someone to hear this story who cares about it.

And it is through Jesus that the story was told...is being told...and will ever be told. This gospel tells us that this little baby Jesus, born and lying in the manger, has an inside on God's story. That it is Jesus within whom the very spirit of God rests and lives in human form. And, that if it were not for Jesus, the story of God would not exist, let alone be able to be told and shared.

This gospel tells us that, if not for Jesus, you and I would not have more than a "Hi, How are you?" connection with God. Imagine not feeling or knowing the emotions, and revelations, and sharing of mutual love heard in the story this morning. Imagine missing all that because you or I did not have the connection upon which to experience that story in a way as our own.

So it is on a far, far greater scale with God. Without Jesus in being the Word, the conveyor of God's story, the interpreter for us, we would not be able to hear, and understand, and live into the story of God...that we would not find the delight, and interest, and insight into that story. And the neat thing, of course, is that we did not have to do anything for this....God made the connection for us. All we have to do is figure it out....make the decision that it is important for us to acknowledge the gift of this Word from God, and to then listen to and follow the story of God along the span of our own lives.

This is how John tells it. Jesus came to the world and love people into the Family of God. And all who follow him, all who believe in him are no longer strangers to God, they are children of God.

And now, let us continue our celebration of Christmas, the nativity of our Lord, and let us look forward to a new year, and a time for new beginnings...because God is impatient and eager for us to hear, and enjoy, and live into God's continuing story....all through the loving Trinity known to us as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.