

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT:

December 24, 2023

It's not easy being green – so saith a famous green prophet in his froggy voice. And it is not easy being a Christian declares a contemporary theologian. The Christian message that God has become flesh, not a part of God, or one aspect of God, but the whole infinite, eternal God creator has become matter. How did Mary ever consent to such a happening? What kind of woman was this? The claim that God has become flesh is so radical that it is virtually unthinkable and illogical. Christianity is the most radical of all world religions because it takes matter seriously as the home of divinity.

It is clear that, from the beginning, some Christians were uncomfortable for such a claim and some of them denied it. John's gospel is aimed at the Docetists who claimed God took on the shape of a human body but did not really become human. Arianism was embraced by thousands of followers believing Jesus Christ was not quite God. Gnostic gospels portrayed the infant and boy Jesus acting as God, doing miracles, raising dead to life. For 2000 years many Christians have drawn back from the humanity of Jesus, not taking it seriously, always approaching Jesus as God whether in worship at Mass or in their prayers and life-style. Mary has been made ethereal, dancing on the stars, not enduring any pain or suffering in childbirth.

Christmas has been dressed up. In paintings, Mary and Joseph look very proper and clean. You mothers know giving birth is not a clean, proper event. The gospels intimate all of this. Life begins in a stable with straw beds that must have itched. A baby is born among blood, water and feces. This baby was breastfed, peed, pooped, screamed and cried and did not give Mary much rest. The first to witness this was a group of dirty, smelly shepherds with their sheep. No officials noticed until the state became alarmed by the wise men that this baby might be a threat to its power.

Christmas rests on God being the power of love, not might, prestige or possessions. The Christian churches have often preferred to look more respectful and powerful. Church representatives have dressed up in silks and ermines and enjoyed having authority over those considered beneath them.

The Incarnation means we live in a sacred world and we are all sacred creatures. The Incarnation took place, first of all, in the very first moment of matter being created, whether this was the big bang or the matter from which the big bang exploded. The world has always been holy and we find God in it, not by fleeing

from it. In the fullness of time this God not only abode in matter but became matter in Jesus Christ. Finally, in the Resurrection, the Incarnation takes full form in the taking a human being, body and spirit, into the godhead. Yes, this is what we mean by Incarnation.

We need not get lost in trying to explain a dogma or an idea. Each of us must travel inwardly into the depth of our soul where the divine love is expressed in the “thisness” of our own particular life. Each of us is a little word of God, a mini-incarnation of divine love. It means letting go of our control buttons and embracing all of life with its sufferings and allow God’s grace to heal us.

We do not only travel inwardly to find God. God is everywhere. Dorothy Day once wrote that God speaks with the voice of our contemporaries. God speaks with eyes of store clerks, factory workers, and children; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and housewives. She continued, it is with the feet of soldiers and tramps that God walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that God longs for shelter.

Yes, Christianity is radical because it is a worldview in which matter and Spirit are understood to have never been separate. Matter and Spirit reveal and manifest each other. This view relies more on awakening than joining, more on seeing than obeying, more on growth in consciousness and love than on clergy, experts, morality, scriptures, or prescribed rituals.

So let us celebrate this Christmas with a deepening awareness of God’s presence, and know Christ is in Israel and Gaza, in Ukraine and Russia, in Sudan, and in China; in gay people and old people, in black and red people as well as white people. Christ suffers with all these people and with us as well. Our Christian hope carries us beyond all that we see and feel and suffer. Christ is still being born daily not in palaces but in stables and in hearts.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

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