

Truly Human (Again)

The Nativity of Our Lord—Christmas Day (25 December 2011)

Festive Divine Service

Saint John 1:1-14

Dearly beloved, what attributes come to mind when you think of God? Most Christians describe God as

big, strong, mighty, all-knowing, present everywhere, exalted, and awesome.

Yet, these attributes only give you one side of the story, for they describe God in His exaltation, in His glory. But Christmas reveals another side of God we are tempted to overlook and forget—His humiliation, His laying aside the attributes that are His from all eternity. Christmas reveals to us that God is also true Man in Jesus Christ. Here on earth, in His humiliation, He is

tiny, weak, fragile, limited, confined to time and space, humble, and ordinary.

In short, He is *human*. Like us, He has flesh and blood. But unlike us, He is what God originally intended humanity to be.

In the beginning our first parents had the image of God. They were *truly human*. But then along came the tempter, who planted words of doubt into their ears. Sure enough, Adam and Eve were no longer happy being human. They wanted to be “**like God**” (Genesis 3:5). And in striving to reach that goal, they *lost their humanity*. Which is to say, they lost the image of God in which they were created.

All of us sons of Adam and daughters of Eve are no different. Despite all of our knowledge, achievements, and abilities, we are *less than human*, a disfigured shadow of what we were originally created to be. This *inhumanity* manifests itself in our relationships with others. Disrespect. Anger. Hatred. Grudges. Jealousy. Gossip. Unkind words. And so much more. This *inhumanity* also manifests itself in our relationship with God. Our independence. Our striving to be like God. Our desire to be in charge, calling our own shots, doing our own thing, exalting ourselves above the God who created us. Sad but true, we are *less than human*, less than what God originally intended us to be.

Where, then, is humanity's hope? In the manger! Our hope, our only hope, was born this day in the city of David, wrapped up in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger. God in a stable. God in diapers. God in the lap of His virgin mother. As big and strong and mighty as God is in His glory, He became tiny, weak, and fragile here in time to save us from ourselves. God decided to *restore humanity* by becoming human Himself. Saint John writes:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That is the first gift and wonder of Christmas. It's what we call the Incarnation, the enfleshment of God, the historic fact that some 2000 years ago in a village called Bethlehem God visibly entered this world as true Man. What's more, this Jesus is the new Adam. **“As in Adam all die,”** writes Paul, **“so also in Christ shall all be made alive”** (1 Corinthians 15:22).

To redeem and cleanse our *inhumanity*, God the Son took our humanity into Himself. And He did it without sin. That is the one difference between Jesus and us. Jesus has no earthly father. He is not a son of Adam, but the Son of God. Thus, He bears our humanity without the inherited stain, the original sin, of our first father. This, too, is cause for great rejoicing, because we see that our sin is something foreign to our humanity. The Word became flesh without sin. We think that our coveting and lusting and grudges and jealousy and lying and greed are just part of being human. “To err is human,” we say. But such nonsense makes sin God's fault and proclaims Him to be a liar, for He called His creation **“very good”** (Genesis 1:31). You can see how *inhuman* we've become, always looking to blame someone else, and indirectly blaming God.

But the Word who became flesh tells us it is not so! To sin is *not human*. Jesus was human and He never sinned. To sin is *inhuman*. It *dehumanizes* us and makes us *less than human*. It is a foreign object, a cancer, a toxin that has seeped into our human nature and polluted it. It robs us of our dignity. And it leads to death.

But fear not, O sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, for I bring you good tidings of great joy, which are for all people. The Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, has *recovered our humanity* and restored the image of God to our flesh and blood via His cross. That's why the heavenly hosts began singing glory to God and announcing peace on earth to the shepherds. For when the Word became flesh, the beginning of our salvation had been accomplished. By uniting our

humanity with His divinity, God made our cause His own. He is our powerful ally who alone has the power to defeat the enemy. Whatever the devil did to us, he has done it to God as well. And that simply won't stand! God came to defeat the devil, to crush His head, via the Word made flesh.

The second gift and wonder of Christmas flows from this first one.

“We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

To look into the face of this Baby lying in the manger, as Mary and Joseph and the shepherds did, is to see the face of God revealed to us. He is full of grace and truth. He is the Incarnation of God's grace, His undeserved kindness, His unmerited favor toward us. We have done nothing to deserve this Child. He is God's gift. He takes up our sin into His perfect humanity and in return gives us His perfect righteousness as our own clothing. Which is to say, we are *truly human* again!

How do you know you are the object of God's grace? How do you know you will stand in God's favor on the Last Day?

Look to the One who is full of grace and truth. Look to the Child in the manger, the Man on the cross. There you will see God, full of grace and truth.

Look to your Baptism, by which He joined you to His death and resurrection.

Look to His Supper, in which He feeds you His life-giving Body and Blood.

Look to His Word, by which He forgives you and declares you to be His own dear Child.

In Word and Sacrament, you see His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Here is where the Word made flesh continues to dwell among you!

So go ahead and describe God as

big, strong, mighty, all-knowing, present everywhere, exalted, and awesome.

But don't forget that He also became

tiny, weak, fragile, limited, confined to time and space, humble, and ordinary to save you from your sins. He, a little Infant, is your Savior. Look closely at Him and see how God works in this world. Not through strength and might. But through suffering and the cross.

All of that is wrapped up in this Christ-child, in this Word made flesh. He became flesh to *restore humanity*, to make you *human* again, to give you anew the image of God. You won't find this gift under your Christmas tree. But thankfully, God has wrapped Him up in flesh and blood and placed Him right here in your midst, manged in His Word and Sacraments, for you! So go ahead and join the angels in singing Gloria to our newborn King. He, the Word made flesh, has *restored humanity*. In Him, you are *truly human* again.

That is God's Christmas gift to you! Merry Christmas!

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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This sermon borrows words and thoughts—our inhumanness apart from Christ and the restoration of our humanity in Christ—from a sermon preached by the Rev. William Cwirla on Christmas Day 1996, and from a sermon preached by the Rev. Aaron Koch on Christmas Eve 2002.