

Year B, December 30, 2018
1 Christmas
Christ Church, Mexia

If Mary gave birth to Jesus and Jesus is the Lamb of God, does that mean that Mary had a little lamb? Sorry, couldn't resist.

And here is something else. In the words of the Rev. Edwin Johnson, "For the Church, this is the ... short and nonetheless important season, the season of Christmas. This season gives us a sense of the expanse of time between Jesus' birth and some of the other important events that happened around it. More importantly, this season also gets us in touch with the fact that the incarnation was not something that occurred just in the conception or in the moments of delivery. Rather the incarnation was something that unfolded over a great amount of time...

Most people who have grown up in the Episcopal or many other Christian churches will have heard the phrase: 'and the Word became flesh and lived among us,' quite a few times. Compared to the pageant-worthy accounts in Matthew and Luke this seems quite unexciting. It is certainly lacking great imagery on the surface. Nonetheless, it becomes more interesting with a closer review of what these words mean and how significant they are. Another way to translate the phrase that gives us a closer experience to that of the original listeners is to say, 'the word became flesh and pitched a tent amidst us.'" Or "...pitched a tent among humanity. And this is because until the Hebrews had finally entered the Holy Land and settled there for a while, they had lived in tents, primarily as nomads. But this sounds a little different to us.

In fact, in the words of the Rev. Joslyn Ogden Schaefer: "The idea of God Almighty pitching a tent among us temper-tantrum prone, smelly, needy, and shame-filled human beings is quite shocking. This earthy image is such a contrast to the more central metaphor for Jesus at the beginning of John's gospel, the *logos*, translated as the *Word*. *Logos* connotes order, rationality, an 'operating system' designed by a masterful creator. But St. John doesn't allow us to indulge our de-personalizing tendency when it comes to relating to God. Instead, he brings us back to the gritty reality of the Incarnation by juxtaposing the *logos* with tent-camping among humankind.

Dirtiness and exposure. So much for putting on our Sunday best to meet Jesus! So much for the obsessive nature of reputation-

management that consciously or unconsciously drives how we present ourselves on social media (or in person). But you know, our aversion to tent-pitching God is about something more than our desire to 'look good' for God. Our deeper fear is being known by Jesus, inside and out. Of, in a phrase, personal intimacy.

Intimacy is in trouble these days. A recent cover story for *The Atlantic* explored the steady delay and decline in intimate relationships (not just marriage) among younger people (here). We live in an age and culture where self-sufficiency and independence are upheld as attainable goals. If you lack a cup of sugar, don't bother your neighbors, just run to a convenience store or Wal-Mart or order from Amazon. Don't know how to fix something? Pull up a video on YouTube on your smartphone. Need a ride to the airport? Don't ask a friend for a favor (who wants to be indebted?), just text Uber for quick service, requiring only your credit card and small-talk, not meaningful conversation.

Genuine intimacy means we'll be exposed, flabby flesh, anxious ruminations, perfectionist tendencies, short-temper, and all." Who wants that – take care of it yourself or call a someone in the gig economy. Avoid relationships!

"The Incarnation, Christmas, is about Jesus pitching his tent in the messiness of the human condition (and we are messy), coming to understand our struggle, our messiness, our finitude, our sin, our truth, and then redeeming it all by assuring us that we are worthy of being Jesus' brother or sister, of being adopted children of God."

And finally, we are reminded by Br. Michael Gallagher, OSB of what Christmas means: "No longer is God abstract, but has become one of us, and we learn that the face and essence of this God is love: ... Without Emmanuel, *God-with-us*, we would not know what God is like. We (also) see in Jesus that he came to serve and not to be served, and we are called to do the same.

Therefore, we are called to be intimate with our neighbor, to love our neighbor. In the words of Paula D'Arcy, "God comes to us disguised as our life." Think about it. If we view life as living with God, full of God-filled moments, the meaning of Christmas will not be lost.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.