

Christmas Eve YC 2024

At Christmas, God Shows Us How to Be Human

By the Rev. Salying Wong

“It gets darker and darker and darker, and then Jesus is born.”¹ We Christians put Jesus’ birth in the darkest time of year not because we believe he was born on December 25. Rather, it is because we believe that even in the darkest, hardest times, we trust that God has not abandoned us. In fact, God forever comes to us to awaken us to the reality that God has never been absent. God’s love for us never fades, even when we don’t feel it. So when Christians started marking the birth of Jesus at the end of the second century, they looked to the Roman calendar, which put the winter solstice on December 25th, the day with the longest night. Eventually, with better observation, we have fine tuned the solstice to December 21.

We also choose the darkest time to mark the coming of Jesus because the physical darkness is a metaphor for our own confusion in challenging times and the distortions of relationships in our lives. Pause a moment right now. Think back through the last year: When have you felt a pang of confusion, anger and sorrow? Christmas asserts that in that dark hour, God was with you, God was guiding you. That even though you might have felt lost, God held you and loved you.

We call Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation. You will probably have heard that this Feast of the Incarnation is about God becoming human, taking on flesh and blood to be one of us. The theologian and New Testament scholar David Bentley Hart rearranges this assertion in an interesting way. He says that only God is truly human and that we are becoming human by God’s help. I like thinking about it this way because it places our humanity on the highest order of consideration, as one

¹ Wendell Berry

with the divine. It is wonderful to be human; it is divine to be made in the image of God. This is our original blessing.

But each of us knows ourselves well enough to feel a little uneasy about our divinity. How many trite and mean thoughts have I had today? How often has my anxiety and impatience been leveraged to treat another person as a means to my end? On this wide earth, we have seen our distortions. Holy desire becomes greed. Holy power becomes domination. Holy pleasure becomes addition. We get lost and do not recall the glory of our full humanity. This is what is meant by us being the ones who are becoming human. Our distortions mar the full expression of who we really are. We need God to show us how to become human.

On Christmas, we celebrate the reality that comes to us to show us how to be human, how to return to our original blessing of being made in the image of God. This is why Jesus took on flesh and came among us, to teach us how to be human, to save us from our distortions, to love us unconditionally. On this night then, as we ponder the mystery of God loving us so much to come to us in flesh and blood, to live among us, die for us, rise and ascend for us, hold onto this truth: you have a hand to hold in the dark. You are not truly lost, even if it feels like it. There is always hope. It gets darker and darker and darker, and Jesus is born.