

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

The other day, my wife Carol asked me why I was smiling at her, and I thought to myself, “Gosh, I don’t know why.” I mean, she was not telling a funny story that I should smile. In fact, she was not doing anything special. She was just reading or sewing or something. But, I know why I smiled at her, and many a husband and wife knows the answer too: It was simply that I take delight in her. I have been for twenty-five years now. It does my soul good just to look at her.

The good news of Christmas is that our Maker looks upon us that way too. Christmas reveals that life here on earth has entirely captured the heart of our Maker. That’s the beautiful thing about this festival of the Holy Incarnation of God: it shows that life on this planet has so charmed our Creator that he has become one of us. Immanuel: “God with us.”

It might not have been so, which is an awful thing to ponder. I mean, it might have been the case that our Maker looked down on us and was left unmoved by us. Even we human creators have experience with that sort of thing. The potter begins to fashion a pot, but doesn’t like how it’s turning out, so he squashes it down and begins again. The composer thinks to herself, “This piece is not working,” and abandons it. The painter wearies and sets aside the canvas. Writers abandon their essays. Why, I have a whole category of sermons on my computer I call “Sermon fragments” — sermons that seemed interesting to me at first but which in the end I abandoned.

Likewise, it could have been the case that our Maker contemplated us and found himself caring little for us. That would have been no

wonder, I guess, for we do fall far short of his glory. Yet, Christmas tells us the opposite story. Christmas tells us our Maker looked down on his human creatures and was so moved by them that he dashed down to become one of them:

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

And so it is with us too: Does not humanity tug on us and charm our hearts? We would well bow our head as one of us passes by – or cry out with some excitement: there goes a human being! there goes another!

Plop a child down in the midst of a batch of little kittens, and remember the sense of wonder and delight that it is possible to take in the existence of life. Come with us Christmas caroling at Lenox Hill Hospital, to the nursery, where we sing “Away in a Manger,” and look with joy and awe upon those newborns on the other side of the glass.

Christmas shows that God feels such delight at our existence. And it is a godly thing for us to share in his delight in life — in all life.

There is a fascinating passage in one of Martin Luther’s sermons in which he contrasts the Holy Incarnation of Our God with its dark opposite: demon possession. Luther knew that in the Bible, Jesus cast out the demons and brought peace to poor tormented people. And such possession is a terrible thing. But Luther observes that it is also a pale and weak thing.

We human beings are not suited for the devils, but we are suited for God. Luther's quote goes thus:

God has thus drawn much closer to us and entered more deeply into our condemned and troubled nature than the devil could. [The devil] can possess and torture a person but cannot personally *become* a human being, as, conversely, a human being cannot become a devil. The two natures remain quite distinct not only in essence but in person. But with the Son of God the two are one; he has our flesh and blood, born of the virgin Mary, true, natural man like you and me... If there was nothing more for us in the newborn child than that our human nature had been highly honored in that God who created us is now our kinsman, our nearest friend, our flesh and blood... it would be little wonder, if we, believing it from the heart, would become so dear to each other that, as the saying goes, we would consume each other with love. If our hearts really perceived the greatness of this honor and we could say with firm faith, God is become man, would it be a wonder if we no longer were enemies with any man and surrendered our lives for each other? (*Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol. 5, pages 112-13*)

And so, all ye lovers of humanity, be encouraged this Christmas morning. The incarnation of God to dwell with us has confirmed what you have long suspected: that life is precious, that human beings should be regarded with reverence, that you do well to give charitable donations for hungry children in Africa or South America, and that you should pray for all, including prisoners, who are not simply lost in some black hole, but remain human beings.

What is man? wonders the Bible with sheer amazement:

⁴What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? ⁵For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. (Psalm 8:4-5, KJV)

Praise to this God who visits us, first in Bethlehem's manger, now in the Blessed Sacrament, and forever in the kingdom to come where one of our kind — a human being — will rule for ever and ever. I speak of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.