

“The Work of Christmas”

The passage we just heard from the Gospel of John is one the earliest hymns to the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Most scholars believe that it was not originally part of the Gospel of John. Rather it was a beloved of hymn that was affixed to the beginning of John. As a poetic prologue, not unlike the first chapter of Genesis which also starts with the words, “In the beginning,” this passage sets the stage for everything else that happens in this Gospel.

Out of the entire prologue I want to focus on just one phrase, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...” There is no one concept, revelation, of action of God that is more precious to Anglicans. We are a people of the “incarnation.” Another way of saying this is that Anglicans are a Christmas people. Now this does not mean that we are caught up in the frenzy of secular Christmas festivities any more than other people are. Rather it is the recognition that our theology, liturgy, and way of being in the world grows out of the incarnation.

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” Anglicans see this as God’s continuing affirmation of what is written in Genesis. That is, God saw each aspect of creation and pronounced it “good.” Moreover, on the sixth day of creation when God saw the whole of what God had made God pronounced it, “very good.”

Each year at Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We Anglicans also celebrate the goodness of creation. We revel in the creation, enjoy it, and tend it as Adam and Eve tended the Garden. We do this because God pronounced creation good and because God, in the form of Jesus Christ, joined us in the flesh and dwelt within the creation.

The incarnation is an invitation to join in the preservation and ongoing creative actions of God. Thus, each year we do more than remember the birth of Jesus. In the observance of Advent we anticipate the new birth of creation in Jesus. In Christmastide we refresh our heart and spirit for the work of tending to the creation. With the end of the twelve days of Christmas we live into what Howard Thurman called, “The Work of Christmas.”

Thurman wrote:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:

To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,

The Rev. Eugene LeCouteur
Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Middleburg, VA

Christmas Day
10 a.m.
December 25, 2022

To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.

Christmas is more than commerce. It is more than a celebration. It is more than a remembrance of things past. Christmas is a calling, a way of looking at creation, and a way of life. Let us embrace this calling as fully as we embrace the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus. Let us embrace the work of finding, healing, feeding, releasing, rebuilding, and peacemaking; all the while with the joyful music of the birth of Christ in our hearts.