

In the flesh

4 2 18

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children.

Our text is the last verse of today's gospel and is John chapter 1 and verse 14:

'And the Word became flesh and lived among us'.

Epiphany came to an end with the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, on or around February 2nd, 40 days on from his birth. Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, is this year in just ten days time on February 14th. So today and next Sunday fill up the gap between significant times in our Christian calendar.

If you, like me, love words then perhaps you are fond of the strange titles given in the Book of Common Prayer, to three Sundays that might lead up to Lent: Septuagesima; Sexagesima, Quinquagesima, 70, 60, 50, counting down the days, approximately in tens, till Easter Day. And if you have a good memory for such things, you may recall that the Catholic Church stopped celebrating Quinquagesima Sunday back in 1969 and nowadays neither do they form a part of the modern, Anglican liturgical calendar.

But what really surprised me, caught my attention when I was reading today's gospel, was the fact that the gospel appointed for today is one of my favourite passages at Christmas – John's account of the incarnation – of the Word made flesh. So, today, well over a month on from Christmas, if you don't mind, I'd like briefly to consider what is so special about Christianity: the notion that God became Man in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that the logos, λογος, Greek meaning 'the mind of God', is embodied in the person of Jesus.

And that is what truly excites me: our Christian understanding of the nature and character of God. That God, our Father, in the person of his Son, Jesus, becomes fully what it is to be human without ceasing to be God, albeit God incarnate. Jesus was born of Mary and he died on the cross. He was circumcised, grew up as a boy in Egypt, in Nazareth and went AWOL – absent without leave – at the age of twelve in Jerusalem. As a man, an adult, he walked around Galilee and went up several times to Jerusalem. He knew what it was like to be tempted by the Devil, to be hungry and thirsty and tired. He ate, drank, slept, knew what it was to feel pleasure and pain, love and the hatred of others. He felt pain when he was hit, was slapped and was nailed to the cross. He could hold out his hand to Peter; he could be kissed by Judas; and could be hugged by Mary Magdalene and touched by Thomas.

So if John is right in saying what we as Christians believe to be true: that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, that Jesus is God born as one of us, living as one of us, dying as all we must, what does that mean for us ?

Simply, it means that God in the person of His Son, Jesus, is not necessarily distant from us or different from us. Well, of course, God the Father is in the sense that he is eternal, without beginning or end, always there – everywhere, that he is omnipotent, omniscient, beneficent, benevolent, the creator of the world, of the universe. But this distant God knows first-hand what it is for us to be us and, as such, opens the way for us to be with him. We can come to him because he is there for us: he loves us enough to be enfleshed for us, to love us, then suffer death for us.

That is what so excites me about what we as Christians believe and gives me the enthusiasm and the energy to be a Christian. God was in the flesh like us and he has opened up the way home to him – but only if we want to, if we chose so to do.

God's choice – to be there for us; will we choose to be there for him ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 37 : In the flesh

