

God's becoming Us – Jan.7, 2024
First Sunday after the Epiphany

John 1:9-14

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (NRSVUE)

Today is the first Sunday of the year 2024. As we entered the new year and new beginnings, I would like to remind you that we also entered Epiphany season starting yesterday on January 6.¹ Epiphany was originally celebrated as a feast of the incarnation, or manifestation of God, as early as the second century, probably in Egypt and Asia Minor. You may be surprised to know that Epiphany is older than the appearance of Christmas in history.²

In today's Bible reading, John tells us a unique Epiphany story. Unlike Matthew and Luke, in the Gospel of John we don't hear anything about the newborn baby lying in a manger. Instead, John begins with a hymn to Christ, telling us the meaning of the coming of Christ. John begins with God's becoming flesh, entering the time-bound world, and living among us.

Through the hymnic, poetic, and theological elucidation, John proclaims the Good News that God became one of us and dwelt among us in and through Jesus. For John, Christ, the eternal Word, exists not only outside time and history, but also among us and deep in our hearts all the time. John reminds us that Epiphany celebrates Jesus' embodying and manifesting God's self-giving love to us.

Consciously or unconsciously, we long from the bottom of our hearts to know God. It is a fundamental human hunger. Through John, we learn that "knowledge of God does not come by observation or by the accumulation of proofs." Instead, God graciously took the initiative to reveal who God is by the incarnation: "Word becoming flesh."³

¹ The word Epiphany came from Greek *epiphaneia*, "manifestation."

² "The evolution of the Christian year was a slower, much more complicated process, many details of which are still mysterious." See James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*.

³ Fred B. Craddock and others, *Preaching through the Christian Year* (Year C).

Last week, I wore a scholar hat and gave a presentation for two hours at the North American Academy of Liturgy, which was held in Seattle. In my seminar group, where Prof. Ruth Meyers was the chair, I was the only member who attended via Zoom. After finishing the presentation and preparing for this sermon, I reread a part of Ruth A. Meyers' book, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, which has been on my bookshelf for a long time.

In her book, she wrote that “the Bible tells the story of God’s mission from the beginning of creation to the promised new creation.” As the Gospel of John says, “in sending Jesus, God’s own self entered human history; that is, the Word became flesh. Through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God restored humankind to the right relationship with every creature and with God. From the very beginning and God’s becoming one of us through Jesus Christ as well as sending the Holy Spirit, God has always been a divine missionary sharing outpouring, self-giving love.⁴ We call it God’s amazing salvific grace. God’s love that knows no bounds!

Our Christian life is rooted in the most fundamental practice, that is, our awareness of God’s presence, God’s being with us, right here, right now. As you listen to this sermon, don’t stay passive, but actively participate in God’s invitation to accept and live out the Good News – being attentive to God’s presence with you. You may pray to God briefly, “Loving God, help me notice that You are in my longing, hoping, struggling at this moment, in the beginning of 2024 and all the time. Whenever I wander and am lost, help me find the way of coming back and anchoring myself to Your unwavering love.”

John sings and proclaims aloud that the true light was coming into the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him – his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him and who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born of God.

If we understand today’s reading-abstract, we need to reread it until we meet God in the midst of who we are or where we are on life’s journey. Incarnation invites us to meet God amid our everyday busy, stressful, and messy life. As Richard Rohr says, “God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in the concrete incarnations of life, and not through purity codes and moral

⁴ Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God’s People, Going Out in God’s Name*.

achievement contests, which are seldom achieved anyway.”⁵ God invites and embraces us right here, right now, saying, “You are my child. I love you. Come to the light.”

As we begin our journey of New Year, let us breathe in and out slowly and deeply, asking ourselves, “What will my New Year of 2024 be like? What are my expectations for the New Year?” “Where is God in my life journey? In my longing and seeking?”

Throughout the Gospel of John, John shows that accepting and living out the Gospel is not about the cognitive or emotional nod, but about following and walking in the footsteps of Jesus, the true light. In other words, God has always opened a gateway for us to become and live as children of God.

On this New Year's Sunday morning, I pray and believe God blesses us abundantly. We are also called to bless God with our whole selves. Let me finish this sermon with the conclusion of Scripture reading in the Iona community in Scotland, saying, “for the Word of God in Scripture, for the Word of God among us, for the Word of God within us.” This links the proclamation of Scripture in the assembly with God’s presence, in deep hearts, and in the world.⁶

We are called to participate in the mission of God, drawn into God’s self-giving love through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God who becomes one of us and who shines on us with bright light!

May God’s grace more abound within and among us in the year of 2024! **Amen!**

⁵ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*.

⁶ Ruth A. Meyers