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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
5 January 2025

Christmas 2 – Year C
Jeremiah 31.7-14
Psalm 84.1-8
Ephesians 1.3-6, 15-19a
Luke 2.41-52

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I hope you're enjoying the full Christmas season – all twelve days of it. Because the Christmas season falls between two fixed dates – December 25, the Feast of the Incarnation, when we celebrate Jesus' birth and January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, when we celebrate the arrival of the magi to worship Jesus acknowledging the manifestation of Christ, God's anointed One, to the world – we don't always have two Sundays falling within Christmastide. But this year we do! Today is the Second Sunday after Christmas Day, and we are given the opportunity to move beyond the sentimentality of Jesus being born in a manger because there was no room at the inn toward the deeper meaning of God being born in human flesh, assuming human form and our human nature, at God's Incarnation.

Today's collect give us a glimpse into that deeper meaning. At the start of this service, we prayed: "O God, who [didst] wonderfully create[d], and yet more wonderfully restore[d], the dignity of human nature..." We're instantly reminded of God making humankind in God's image on the sixth day of Creation, but we're also reminded of the Fall of humankind by disobedience and sin, necessitating the restoration of the dignity of human nature which God accomplished when God assumed our human nature by being born in human flesh as Jesus the Christ, God's anointed One.

This interplay between Jesus as God and Jesus as human is revealed in today's Gospel reading. The Gospel according to St. Luke, more than the other Gospel accounts, gives us glimpses into Jesus' life between his birth and the beginning of his ministry around the age of thirty. St. Luke tells of the traditional naming ceremony when Jesus was eight days old, which we observed as the Feast of the Holy Name this past Wednesday, and given the name commanded by the angel to Mary at the Annunciation, "Jesus," meaning "the one who saves." St. Luke also tells of Jesus being presented in the temple forty days after his birth to be dedicated or consecrated as holy to the Lord, as required by Jewish law of first-born sons. We're told that following the Presentation Jesus grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the grace or favor of God was upon him.

Today we're told of a very human incident in Jesus' life. Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, go every year from Nazareth in Galilee to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. They were very religious. Have you ever stopped to think of all the journeys they made to Jerusalem? It's one thing to swing by the Temple to present Jesus forty days after his birth in Bethlehem because that's just seven miles away on their trip back to their home in Nazareth. But Nazareth is 88 miles from Jerusalem, and to make that round-trip every year, when traveling wasn't that easy back then? Anyway, Mary and Joseph are making their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and this may be the first year Jesus goes with them because age twelve was around the traditional time for a young boy to begin formal training in the law. On the way back to Nazareth after the festival, they realize that Jesus isn't with them. Now before you think that Mary and Joseph should be brought up on charges of child neglect, you have to realize this was a big

caravan of friends and relatives who travelled together from Galilee. In the context of “it takes a village to raise a child,” the assumption is that Jesus is somewhere in the group with his friends. When they realize he’s missing, Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days of searching, they find him “in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” Not just a teacher among teachers, but the young Rabbi Jesus among other rabbis; moreover, the Son of God among the rabbis.

Mary, likely with an understandable mix of relief and anger, asks Jesus, “Child, why have you treated like this?” Jesus disarmingly answers: “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Jesus claiming to his parents God as his Father. Jesus, in the temple, where twenty-one Passovers later he will overturn the money tables and drive the sellers outside, giving the authorities an excuse to put him to death.

After being found in the temple, Jesus returns to Nazareth with his parents, and we’re told he was obedient to them. We’re also told that Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. Not just favor with God, as after the Presentation, but favor with God and humanity – bridging the divine and the human.

Because bridging the divine and the human is the reason why God assumed human nature in the person of Jesus at the Incarnation. It was part of God’s plan of salvation to reconcile humankind with God, humanity with the divine. In the petition of today’s collect, we prayed to God, “[g]rant that we may share the divine life of him [Jesus] who humbled himself to share our humanity.” Recognizing the dual nature of Jesus as both human and divine, at the mingling of the water and the wine during the

preparation of the gifts at the altar for the Eucharist, Mtr. Lynn and I pray: “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in Christ’s divinity as he humbled himself to share in our humanity.” As Roman Catholic theologian Michael Grosch puts it: “When we receive the Eucharist, we are receiving Jesus’ Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, and we are joined in such a close union with God, a *communion* ...that our common human nature is mixed with the divine!”¹

It’s this union with God, this communion, for which the Church exists. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. (BCP p. 855) God precipitated this mission when God restored the dignity of human nature at the Incarnation when God assumed our human nature in the person of Jesus. As Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, by God’s own act God’s divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother. (BCP p. 849) God furthered this mission when Jesus became human so that in him we might be adopted as children of God and be made heirs of God’s kingdom. (BCP p. 850) God cemented this mission when Jesus reversed our disobedience so soon after Creation, and was obedient to God, even unto suffering and death. By his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus made the offering which we as mere human beings could not make. In Jesus, by his death on the cross and his resurrection, we are freed from the power of sin and reconciled to God. (BCP p. 850)

God began this plan for our salvation after our disobedient Fall from Creation with the Incarnation of God’s divine Son. God continued this plan for our salvation with

¹ *Roman Missal, Secret Prayers of the Mass* at <https://aedificatiodei.wordpress.com/2012/05/14/the-secret-prayers-of-the-mass-the-commingling-of-water-and-wine/>

Jesus' obedience that led him to die on the cross. God brought to fruition this plan for our salvation by raising Jesus from the dead. That's why it's no accident that we hear today's collect, appointed for this season when we celebrate the Incarnation, repeated at the Great Vigil of Easter when we celebrate the night of our Passover when Jesus passed over from death to life. This same prayer is offered in response to the hearing of the story of Creation, the traditional first reading at the Easter Vigil as part of the record of God's saving deeds in history: "O God, who [didst] wonderfully create[d], and yet more wonderfully restore[d], the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity."

God offers us this plan of salvation in the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of God's divine Son, Jesus Christ. As St. Paul tells us: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us...we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5.18-21). In this New Year, may we accept this plan of salvation that God offers through Jesus Christ, so that we may be reconciled to God and might become the righteousness of God in this world. Amen.