

**Word of the Father,  
Now in Flesh Appearing**

**'O Come All You Faithful'**

**Hymn #159, Isaiah 9:2-7, and Luke 2:1-20**

**Preached as Brentwood Presbyterian Church on Dec. 24, 2009**

The carol from which our text this evening comes  
is really an invitation.

It invites us all to come and see  
what all the amazing, seemingly unbelievable things  
recorded in the Christmas stories are all about,  
come and be awed and amazed  
at what God has done  
and what it means for us.

It is an invitation  
directed to our hearts and souls,  
to those places deep within us  
that long for love and acceptance and guidance and support.

It is an invitation  
to become fully human in relationship with Jesus Christ,  
the living Word of God  
who become flesh with us and for us on that first Christmas.

That's what I want to spend some time reflecting about  
on this Christmas Eve of 2009 –  
what does God's appearing in the flesh  
really mean for us  
here at Brentwood in Burnaby tonight and into 2010.

God comes as a Word  
and comes in the flesh.

These two ways of talking about what happened that first Christmas  
capture much of what is really important about the event.

An event that has universal meaning  
(*logos* in Greek means meaning or message)  
is happening here,  
one that has angels singing and shepherds jumping for joy,  
one that draws some of the greatest scholars of the age  
to a little town in remote outpost of the Roman empire,

one that has the political and religious powers of the age  
frightened enough to order a maniacal massacre.

That event is the coming into human flesh  
of the Creator of all that is,  
God of God and Light of Light  
in the ancient church's language,  
the Source and Sustaining Power of the entire universe.

This power and energy  
enters into a human being in Jesus of Nazareth.  
In him, we see – actually see –  
what living a Godly life is all about.

For many in our contemporary society,  
the Christmas event is hard to comprehend,  
let alone believe in and ground their lives in.  
There are all sorts of ways  
of dismissing the real reason for this season  
as a fanciful myth and deluded thinking.

As for those of us who gather here at Brentwood  
to worship and learn,  
to enjoy fellowship, and  
to engage in service,  
we find in the event of God taking flesh on that first Christmas  
the real meaning of our lives.  
We are comforted by the grace of God being with us in the flesh  
and challenged to share that grace through our own lives.

It is an act of faith to believe in such a thing,  
an act that goes way beyond  
what we can figure out by reason alone.  
It is an act of faith that brings together  
the yearnings of our hearts,  
the searchings of our minds, and  
the hungerings of our souls  
into a realization that in this event  
God's love reached out to us  
in a dramatically new way  
to bring us back into the intimate relationships  
God has desired for us since creation.

What I find intriguing in the thinking of many of those  
who dismiss the possibility of faith in general  
or the Christian faith in particular  
is their refusal to let God be God.

They look at the miraculous, seemingly unbelievable,  
elements in the Christmas story  
and find there reasons to dismiss its credibility.  
I, along with Christians down through the centuries,  
listen to the Christmas story  
and find a message of comfort and challenge  
that gives human life in all its diversity common meaning and direction.

It is a story that resonates deep within my heart and soul,  
a story that inspires hope,  
a story that gives meaning and direction  
to the contribution I can make  
to the flourishing of life in this world.  
It is a story of comfort and challenge.

The comfort of the Christmas story  
is that God has come to be with us,  
to reveal Himself to us  
as a fellow human being.

This is a unique way of communicating for gods.  
It's not just words, or mighty miraculous acts.  
It is a living Word in Jesus Christ.  
God actually takes on human flesh  
and lives a human life  
in Jesus Christ.

The depth of love and respect for humanity and humanity's home this shows  
is remarkable.

Human life is not simply something to be endured  
in order to get to a better state.  
It is something to be honoured, revered, and savoured.  
It is something beloved and blessed by God.  
It is something to be treated like a gift from God,  
not a test to be endured,  
but a gift to be treasured and used with gratitude.

And therein lies the challenge.

There are some wonderful words  
in the Presbyterian Church in Canada's *Book of Forms*  
that capture this challenge concisely.  
They are in the section outlining the responsibilities of the session  
in the local congregation  
and have to do with the provision of Christian education.  
Christian education is offered so that people

*may be confronted by the Gospel, may grow in faith, participate in the life of the Christian community, and be active witnesses to Christ in the world.*

If we rise to the challenge of Christmas,  
strengthened by the comfort of Christmas,  
we will strive together to find ever more effective ways  
of confronting people with the comfort and challenge of the Gospel,  
of helping people grow in their faith,  
of providing opportunities to participate in the life of the Christian community,  
and of being active witnesses to Christ in the world.

The next couple of years will be crucial  
in the life and witness of Brentwood.  
We have the opportunity to invest in a flourishing future,  
finding new people  
with whom to share the comfort and challenges of the Gospel,  
inviting them to come and see what God is doing in Jesus Christ  
for the sake of this world.

We have the opportunity to help people see  
the presence in their lives  
of a wonderful counselor in times of trouble and stress,  
of a mighty hopeful presence in times of despair,  
of a loving parent in times of loneliness,  
and of a proponent of peace in times of hatred and conflict.  
That's what God promised through Isaiah.  
That's what God accomplished in Jesus Christ.  
That's what this church strives to offer  
as the continuing Body of Christ in the world.

The first people to experience the Word of God appearing in the flesh -  
shepherds from the hills around Bethlehem,  
wise men from the centres of learning,  
travelers being taxed and harried staff at the inn,  
Mary and Joseph themselves -  
had their lives changed dramatically by that event.  
They saw the world differently,  
they acted differently,  
they contributed to their communities differently,  
all because they knew in the depths of their hearts and souls  
that God was fulfilling the promises of the ages  
in Jesus of Nazareth.

God was inaugurating an age of comfort and challenge,  
the comfort of God being with us and for us  
as we rise to the challenge of being a community of wisdom, peace, and justice  
in a world crying desperately for those life-giving gifts.

Beginning on January 10 here at Brentwood,  
we will spend a year of Sundays at worship  
and every other Friday night at our adult Bible study  
exploring the comforts and challenges of the Gospel  
through a study of the Psalms.  
Each week we will explore what God is saying to us  
as members of Christ's church  
in one of those great hymns and prayers of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

We will allow ourselves be searched by those Psalms,  
prodded and provoked by God's Spirit  
to examine our lives in their light,  
listening for how we can enjoy a deeper faith,  
share a richer love,  
and build a stronger community.

Martin Luther,  
one of the dominant thinkers in the founding of Protestantism,  
said the Book of the Psalms included  
"most beautifully and briefly  
everything that is in the entire Bible."  
He called it a really fine handbook for the Christian life.

Throughout the search –  
as we both search within ourselves and are searched by God –  
we will look to the way Jesus Christ,  
the Word of the Father in flesh appearing,  
embodies the faith, hope, and justice  
spoken of in the Psalms.

All the while,  
we will find fresh and convincing ways  
of inviting our friends and neighbours  
to get centred in Jesus Christ in worship and learning,  
enjoy community with Jesus Christ in fellowship, and  
experience the compassion of Jesus Christ in service.

But that is all in the future.  
This evening let us rest in the assurance  
that God is with us  
and brings the brilliant light of grace in Jesus Christ  
to all people who walk in the darkness of our day.

Amen