

*Sermon for Christ Church; Christmas I; December 27, 2009
John 1:1-18; the Word became flesh and lived among us; by Rev. John Perry*

Today's Gospel, the opening words of John, is wonderful. It reminds me there are two different ways of thinking about God, and God's existence:

First, as *transcendent*; this stresses God's nature and form being different from the existence of men & women; a totally *other* form of existence, distinct and separate from the world.

It is possible we might hear this, in the opening verse: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This verse seems to view God, as being supremely above all things.

Second, as *immanent*; this stresses God's indwelling in the world, at work in processes that we find within the world.

I believe we hear this, in the verse: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us."

So it seems this Gospel is trying to have it both ways; indeed, God *is* both: transcendent and immanent. We acknowledge this symbolically, every time we make the sign of the cross: both transcendent – the vertical axis; and immanent – the horizontal axis.

But something fundamental changed at Christmas – there really *was* a baby; Jesus was born into the world. This forever changes how we see the world.

There's a wonderful old movie, *The Lilies of the Field*. It tells the story of an itinerant handyman, played by Sidney Portier, who gets caught up in the life of a small community of expatriate nuns. There's a scene when the Mother Superior tells the people in town, who have gathered for Mass: "This man, Homer Schmidt, he has been sent by God to build us a chapel!"

The people start talking to each other, and she hastens to insist, "It's true!" Mother Superior steps out of character, to exclaim this, so enthusiastically. She previously has been quite reserved, and stern. But then we see such excitement in her face, and we hear it in her voice: "This man, Homer Schmidt, he has been sent by God to build us a chapel! It's true!"

If you believe, that "The Word became flesh and lived among us" – then it follows that you will also believe, and look for, what Mother Superior says.

Because if God indeed is in the world – if God's immanence, was manifested in that baby 2,000 years ago, then it stands to reason that we have discovered something essential about God, that does not change and will not change: that God will continue to be found, working within the world's processes and people.

When we believe that the Word became flesh and lived among us, we have already signed on to a God who does, just what Mother Superior says he does. So perhaps we need to begin thinking and speaking, more like she does. We can try expressing it this way: “God has sent ‘so-and-so’ into my world; or God has caused ‘thus-and-such’ to happen. In order to accomplish ‘that’ in our lives; or in order to accomplish ‘this’ in my own life.”

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”

When we believe this, we have already signed on to a God who does, just what Mother Superior says he does: “This man, Homer Schmidt, he has been sent by God to build us a chapel! It’s true!”

This Christmas season, may we celebrate a Transcendent God, who has also become ultimately and profoundly Immanent. May we wonder, ever more, what this has to do with our own lives. And may we perhaps then, begin to think and speak, a little more, like Mother Superior:

“God has sent ‘this person’ into my world; or God has caused ‘this thing’ to happen. In order to accomplish ‘this purpose’ in our lives; or in my own life.”

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