

Mid-Week Advent Service  
December 9, 2020  
1 John 1:5 - 2:2  
Luke 2:25-35

In the name of Jesus, our God Who is with us. Amen.

Current events. When I was a kid in school, this was something we all had to be familiar with. Ages ago, people would get newspapers delivered to their houses. I usually went straight to the sports page to see the scores from the Dodger game, but once a week, I would have to find a story, cut it out, and tell the class about some current event. It wasn't just me, of course. Every student in the class was expected to participate. Four or five of us per day, and every week we took our turn. The goal behind this exercise was that students would be more informed about the reality of the world around them. Twenty to Twenty-five stories a week about the current state of affairs would drive into our little child brains an awareness that the world is an interesting place.

There were some questions that each student was expected to answer regarding our current event. We had to know how to pick out some specific details from the stories. If the writer was efficient, most of the information required would be found in the first paragraph of the story. Journalists were once trained to just give the facts, to answer the most critical questions with just the facts. Who, where, what, when, how, and why? These were questions that we were all expected to be able to answer based on the information provided in the story.

Before the lockdowns in March, I was having a conversation with my old Political Science teacher at Crafton Hills. He was telling me that he had to change the way he structured his class. Rather than having a useful exam on substantive questions about the problems with democracy, the shortcomings of the Articles of Confederation, and the solutions offered by the Constitution, he was now going to have the students turn in short papers on current events from actual news stories, since many students cannot differentiate between news, opinion, and analysis. "They don't know what's going on," he said, with his New York attitude and accent. It is a dangerous thing for a democracy to have many of its people with no clue what is taking place, shaping the reality around them. Sadly, I suspect that many Christians might not be able to answer basic questions about current events in the church.

The basic questions do have some basic answers. Who is involved? God and us. Where is it happening? Everywhere His Gospel is proclaimed. What is happening? Sins are forgiven. How is it happening? Through God's grace in Christ. Why is He doing it? Because God so loved the world. Most Christians would agree with these responses. And as valid as these responses are, they do not capture the full scope of reality. The incarnation of Christ two thousand years ago is an event that defines every answer to these questions. That ancient event is timeless, as in, it is not bound by time, so it is always a current event. So, let us, to the extent that we can, explore how these questions may be answered today, lest we receive the rebuke, "They don't know what's going on!"

Who is it that is currently active in the incarnation? When God called Moses to liberate the children of Israel from Egypt, Moses asked God who he should say had sent Him. God replied, "Tell them I am the I am." Maybe Moses was thinking, "Well, that clears it up." We are

not asking, what is God? That is a different type of question. We are not only looking at a description of God, of what His attributes are, though those can be helpful in this. Who is this God? Who is the I AM? What is the essence of this God? In some ways, the first essence of God is that He *is*. He is ultimate Being; the One who has a unique sense of what it means to be. He always was, always is, and always will be. If that seems relatively simple to grasp, to truly understand, then you have had a different experience of existence than I have. I have never been in more than one place at a time, never been in more than one time at a time. God has been, is, and always will be because He is that transcendent Being. And within this infinite God, all of creation exists. He makes room for creation, and He makes room for us. Since God exists outside of time, He necessarily exists outside of space. If God is infinite, then the challenge is to figure out where He is, and that is our second question.

Where is God? We take something for granted when we speak of God's omnipresence. Rather than assuming that omnipresence is merely a function of God's essence, we should also see it as a product of His will. God could have been a detached supreme being, a clockmaker with no interest in the outcome of creation, but merely interested in the mechanics of the universe. Or, God could have chosen to be a celestial Big Brother, watching every move, waiting for people to sin, so He can add beans to an endless array of jars. One's concept of who God is, what God does, and why God does it will have a dramatic impact on how comforting the omnipresence of God is. The Psalmist marvels at God's boundless being: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I hide from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."<sup>1</sup> God can be everywhere, He could manifest His presence everywhere, yet He doesn't because He expects to be sought; He reveals something of Himself because He expects to be found where He said He would be.

The fullest manifestation of the presence of God occurred in the incarnation of Jesus. He declares Himself to be the "Son of Man", a figure who had taken on divine personhood in some lines of Jewish thought in the centuries leading up to the incarnation.<sup>2</sup> The divine Jesus tells us where He will be. He is in His Church, where two or three gather in His name, there He is as one who serves us. His Holy Spirit is in the waters of baptism, the waters of regeneration. He says He will be in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The God of all creation, timeless and spaceless, comes to us now in a veiled way just as He once came to humanity in a veiled way, veiled in human vesture. Where is He? Where He says He will be.

What is God doing there? The bold assumption is that God has not come all this way, from the highest heavens, into the womb of Mary, into human form where He endured the most horrific of deaths, where He was forsaken by His Father whom He had known in eternity, into the darkness of the tomb, then raised from the dead, just so that He could be with us and do nothing. What is He doing? He is doing the same things He did all those years ago. He is consoling Israel, redeeming the fallen world, restoring lost humanity, giving life to all creation, forgiving sins, not just any sins, your specific sins, and ruling His kingdom. We have a busy God.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 139:6-8

<sup>2</sup> Daniel 7:13 This figure was contemplated as a great mystery by Jews in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Ethiopia.

How does He do all this? By entering space and time, transcending His own created space, invading it as it were, and sanctifying it with His presence. He does this by becoming both alien and neighbor to humanity, dying a death we could not die, all so that He could be where He wants to be, even now. The mystery of the incarnate life of Christ is that He hides among us in order to be found by us. He veils His presence, first in human flesh, then in bread and wine. He tells us He will be there so that, through the eyes of our faith, we may see Him there. He hides there, but He tells us where He is because He wants us to look for Him. A child who hides during a game of hide-n-seek wants to be found. Christ wants to be found; He celebrates with us when we find Him. We would not be able to find Him without Him revealing Himself to us, saying “look over here”. And when we look, we find Him. All of this is made possible because He is the Word made flesh, the Son of Man, come down from on high, and to Him is given every authority, glory, and power over all people from every tribe and language. He has the heavenly authority to forgive sins, to build His kingdom of believers, and to make us into His image, into His body. Astonishingly, He does this when He enters into our being, into our mouths incarnationally, in the Eucharist.

Why does God do all this? Is it just to show how powerful He is? There are other, more convincing ways for God to show His creative power. God shows something of how big He is and something of His humility by making room for us, making room for our faith. There must be more motivating God than a desire to be glorified. God is not a narcissist. He has done all this for us, out of love for us, because God desired a people to love. It is a platonic misconception of the divine to assume that God is absolutely complete, free of any wants. God desires to love, and to have that love freely reciprocated. God wants to be with humanity, so He comes into human space and time so that He can draw all men unto Himself. It is profoundly profound, that out of love for a fallen creation, Christ would take His place as one of us so that He can truly call us His own. In the incarnation, He marries Himself to humanity by becoming human. So great is His love for us that there is nothing He wouldn't do for us, even dying so that we might live. And He comes to us, again and again, and we find Him again and again. It is a most joyous game of hide-n-seek, where Jesus never tires of hiding and being found, and we never tire of looking for Him, for we always find Him.

The incarnation is the ultimate current event. It is perpetually current, always new, yet always old. It is happening, all the time. How should we sum up this current event? I believe I can do that in a single sentence: God is the ultimate being, the I AM, who continuously hides Himself within creation, so that He can console humanity with His grace and mercy through His holy Word and Sacraments, in the church, because He loves those whom He created. So, we are not like those who don't know what's going on. Having found Christ just as He has revealed Himself to us, we see all that He has done, all that He is doing, and we look forward to all that He will do. Let us ponder and see this great mystery during Advent, into Christmas, and throughout the year, for having seen it all with faithful eyes, we may depart in His peace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.