

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 11/17/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

There are plenty of words that we use in the church that are rarely, perhaps never used in any context outside the church. So, it's not unusual that we say or hear these words without fully understanding what they mean, or even at all. As we're moving toward the Christmas season, one of those words that we're likely to hear is "incarnate" or variations like "incarnational." You may hear expressions like "GOD incarnate," but do you know what it means? Very simply, "incarnate" means "made flesh." At Christmas time, we celebrate our "GOD made flesh" or our GOD who becomes human. That's very much what Christmas is all about—GOD being born as a human being, JESUS.

For people in biblical times, this was a significant thing, that GOD would become human. Some mythologies would have stories about gods who appeared in human form in order for some short-term activity, like having sexual relations with a human being or providing some gift or punishment. Always, though, they would appear, do their thing, and then be gone. For GOD to come and live among us as JESUS for 33 years was pretty much unprecedented. And for GOD to become human in such a vulnerable form as a baby was simply astonishing. This is what makes our GOD different from all those other human-made gods that people believed in. Our GOD became human—incarnate.

One of the proofs of this incarnation was JESUS' death. Gods don't die. They are not controlled; they control others. But the life of JESUS tells us so much about our GOD who is becomes incarnate. GOD knows what we feel because JESUS experienced the full range of human emotion—joy, anger, frustration, hope, doubt, hunger, temptation, playfulness, etc. JESUS felt pain and suffered. JESUS was fully human—incarnate.

When JESUS instituted Holy Communion at the LORD'S Supper, HE took a very common human practice—eating—and made it into something very special. JESUS presented a way through which HE could become part of us. When we receive the bread and the wine in faith, we receive JESUS HIMSELF. In doing so, we receive the blessing of HIS sacrifice and the promise of HIS resurrection. But the key part of this is that phrase "in faith." If we take the bread and the wine without believing that it is JESUS, we only receive, well, bread and wine. But, in faith, we receive JESUS into our hearts and lives. We receive GOD incarnate.

One of the things I try to do when I give the wafer, the bread, sometimes called the "host," to those who come to the altar for Holy Communion, I try to do something that I hope helps to symbolize the incarnation of GOD. I try to make sure that I touch the person receiving the bread. I want them to feel that physical, human touch to remind them that GOD became human—incarnate—and that they are receiving JESUS who is GOD incarnate. Most folks likely are not aware of that physical touch, or dismiss it as just normal, coincidental contact. But it is intentional and it is a reminder that they are receiving something very special, JESUS HIMSELF, GOD incarnate.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey