

I was looking at a brochure for an upcoming conference that came in the mail this week. It is featuring a nationally known speaker and one I would like to hear. However, there was an \* after the person's name and I wondered what that meant. It took a little searching but there it was, in very, very small letters: "\*live via satellite." In other words, the person was not going to be at the conference in person but would be seen projected on a screen (and they are asking good money for the conference). He would be "live" somewhere else. I tossed the brochure in a nice "round" file near my desk.

Christmas is our celebrating again the very presence of God in our midst: **God is here.** God came and lived among us. Isaiah's light has come. The darkness of the world has been shattered forever. Those who walked in darkness have seen a light that will be with us forever.

Can you imagine being one of the shepherds on that hillside near Bethlehem? The night dark with only a few stars or perhaps a whole sky full but there is probably not a bright full moon. There are no lights from nearby cities. It is dark... there are no artificial means of producing light. We were flying across the Pacific. It was the time when we had all been fed and the lights were turned down inside the plane for sleeping, etc. We were looking out the window and could only see a few stars. It was dark, there was nothing, no lights as far as the eye could see. We were too far from land for there to be any artificial light. The night took on an eerie feeling as we searched for some glimmer of light. Such was the night in Bethlehem. As a shepherd you are sleepy, it has been a long day, but this is the time when the herd is most vulnerable to predators. You watch and listen. Suddenly the sky is alive with light (described by Luke as the *glory of the Lord*). You rub your eyes; you stand in awe and fear. There is not only light and an angel but words, a message, a promise, "*Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord.*"

Suddenly the whole sky is filled with angelic hosts and the words continue in a wonderful song of hope and promise. God, the Messiah, is now asleep in a manger in a stable in Bethlehem. The promise of Isaiah is being fulfilled this night. The *Light of the World* has come. John says of this light, "*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it*" (John 1:4-5). This is a time for celebration (Is. 60:5). The darkness will never return. Hope has broken forth, angels sing, a baby cries and **God is here!**

Christmas is our reminder of God's Incarnation: God is with us. There is a danger that we have sugar coated this baby, this child of Bethlehem. We tend to idealize his life among us and fail to understand the human quality of who he is. Max Lucado in his book *The Eye of the Storm* tells of a woman who returned one of his books to the bookstore where she purchased it. He writes:

"A bookstore owner in the Northwest once told me about an angry lady who stomped into his store carrying my book *God Came Near*. She slammed the book on the counter, said a few less-than-kind things about the book and then screamed loudly for everyone on the block to hear, 'My God didn't have pimples!'

I know the paragraph that put the spark in her tinderbox. It reads like this: Jesus may have had pimples. He may have been tone-deaf. Perhaps a girl down the street had a crush on him or vice-versa. It

could be that his knees were bony. One thing for sure: He was, while completely divine, completely human.”

**God is here.** God became as human as we are. He came as we did and as we do, in human form. When he returned to Nazareth, they knew his parents (Matthew 13:55). At one point his mother, brothers and sisters come and try to discover what he is up to and maybe even want to bring him home, back to his senses (Matthew 12:46). Nathaniel asks, “if anything good can come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46). John the Baptist sends his messengers to see if Jesus is the Promised One or should he be looking for another (Luke 7:18). He came from a specific place, had a family and a lineage. We don’t have time to go into all the doubts about his humanity or his divinity. There are those who just cannot comprehend God loving us enough to become as we are: human.

Yet, Christmas is our affirmation of the Incarnation: **God is here.** God came as a baby, through the natural birth process. He probably chased the chickens and newborn lambs around the village. He banged his finger with a hammer as he was learning how to use it and got splinters in his hands from the wood in the carpenter’s shop. He needed to be taught how to use a fork and knife. He held children in his arms and touched the sick. He knows the pain of loss, John the Baptist. He weeps for Jerusalem. He knows the anguish of the garden. He felt the nails, he knows the pain.

It is because of this that he knows our pains and our joys. After all he was also accused of being a party animal (Luke 7:34). He would dance with the brides and laugh with the crowd. He would know the toil of daily work. He was one who blended in while standing out. And our faith says that through all of this he remained without sin. Even through the teen-age years. Yes, he went through childhood and was a teen-ager!

Christmas is a reminder to us of the love of God. The miracle is not in the birth but in the fact that **God is here.** Joseph holds him in his arms, Mary nurses him and a manger holds him.

We have a statue of a pregnant Madonna. As you can see she is very pregnant. Diane was commissioned to do it for a friend. He wanted it for his Advent display in the hospital chapel. He tells of how the younger nuns found offense in a pregnant Madonna. For some reason they did not want to see Mary pregnant. He would say that if the Christmas story is true then Mary was very pregnant. After all, Joseph and Mary did not find Jesus in a cabbage patch!

Max continues about the woman who returned his book:

“I understand why this woman became upset. I can relate to her discomfort. We quickly fix the crack in the stained glass. We rub away any smudges on the altar. There is something safe about a God who never had calluses. There is something awesome about a God who never felt pain. There is something majestic about a God who never scraped an elbow.

But there is something cold about a God who cannot relate to what you and I feel.

If I had a moment with that lady, I would ask her, ‘Jesus may not have had pimples, but don’t you hope that he could have?’”

**God is here.** For this what our salvation is all about, “For God so loved the world....

Lucado, Max, *In the Eye of the Storm*, Word Publishing (Flame Ministries, Inc, Philippines), 1991 p.34