

Christmas Eve (4pm); 24 December 2009
Isaiah 52:7-10; Ps 98
Heb 1:1-4; John 1:1-14

Rev. Deborah Meister

At the center of the shelf in the Godly Play room where our church school children come to learn about God, there is a small olivewood nativity set: Mary and Joseph, angels and animals, and, in the center, a tiny baby Jesus lying in a manger, hands outstretched to embrace the world. On the second day of class, the teacher put it in the center of the circle of children and told them, "This is the Holy Family. Sometimes, when you see something like this, it is not for children to touch. It might break easily, so you need to ask if you can touch it or work with it. *This* holy family is for you."¹

I want us to think about those words this Christmas. Before the birth of Christ, people thought about God the way we often think of some valuable decoration. Earth and heaven were far apart. Where God lived, it was perfect, beautiful, incorruptible, unchangeable. Where we lived, we were under the power of evil and death. So we had to be very careful how we reached out to God, how we tried to work with him. We had to be very pure, because our impurity would prevent us from reaching God. We had to be very righteous, because only by keeping all God's rules could we be sure of God's love. We had to think about God only in certain ways, because our questions and ideas might drive God away. God was a mighty fire who could strike without warning and consume us to cinders. Sometimes, we still think that way.

But God changed all that on Christmas. God chose to break down the wall which divided earth from heaven, and to put in its place a "path toward God for men and a way for God to enter our souls." (St. Macarius) God came among us on that first Christmas day, taking on our own flesh, so that we could never again say God was far off, or did not understand. *God does*. God took on our struggles and questions and illness and death, so that we could never say we were too impure to reach God. *We can*. God took on Godself our iniquity, so that we could never again pretend God does not care how we hurt one another. *God does*. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and the Spirit of God dwells there still.

What the teacher said to the children so many months ago, God says to us today: "This [baby] is for you. I am for you. You can touch me, work with me, wonder about me. At the end, I will even let you break me. You can put on costumes and make plays about me, even if you struggle with the lines. You can put on my life and live like me, and I will live in your heart as in a manger, and I will help you. You are loved beyond your wildest imagination. You are loved beyond choirs of angels and sudden stars and the slow turning of galaxies. All these, I laid aside when I was born this night. But you: YOU are what I was seeking all along."

Have a blessed, blessed Christmas!

¹ Jerome Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, Vol. 2.