



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

4th Sunday in Advent (C) – Hebrews 10:5-10

Focus: *The Reason for the Season*

word of life

“And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:10 (NRSV)

Read Hebrews 10:5-10

At first glance, this seems to be a strange reading for the Sunday before Christmas Day. Images of sacrifices and offerings, and of doing God’s will, predominate these five verses. But this reading is in many ways an explanation of the Incarnation; we hear the purpose and significance of the birth of Jesus for the world. Jesus was born ... to die.

1. *What themes do you associate with Christmas?*
2. *How are Christmas and the cross connected?*

The reading for today is a part of a lengthy section on the central theme of Hebrews: that the sacrifices and offerings by human priests cannot take away sin (the old covenant) so the true sacrifice (the new covenant) is required. This sacrifice is the purpose for which Christ was born; and his obedience to God’s will sanctifies us and makes us whole. (See Hebrews 10:10.)

The assigned reading for today begins with an incarnational statement: “...when Christ came into the world...” (Hebrews 10:5 NRSV) In these few words, the author summarizes the words from John’s gospel – “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory ... full of grace and truth.” (John 1: 14 NRSV) The incarnation is also seen in the words from Hebrews (from Psalm 40:6-8) which are placed by the writer in the voice of Christ saying, “...a body you have prepared for me.” (Hebrews 10:5 NRSV) The significance of Christ becoming flesh cannot be overstated. Frederick Buechner in his book *Wishful Thinking: A Seekers ABC*, writes, “...incarnation means that all ground is holy ground because God not only made it but walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it. If we are saved anywhere, we are saved here.” (© Harper San Francisco, 1973, p. 52)

3. *What does the incarnation mean to you?*
4. *What difference does it make?*

The writer of Hebrews emphasizes Christ’s obedience to do God’s will by entering the world as a human body and offering himself as a pure sacrifice. In two verses in our reading for today, the words are attributed to Christ, “I have come to do your will.” (Hebrews 10:7, 9) The old way of relating to God—the old covenant—is abolished; and the new way in the sacrificial gift of Christ is established. (vs. 9)

5. *Have you ever thought of Christmas as the beginning of a new way of relating to God and God relating to us?*

The incarnation—Emmanuel, God-with-us—is enfleshed in the birth of the infant Jesus. It is our salvation in Jesus’ obedient sacrificial death on the cross. It is what sanctifies us, making us holy and whole in God’s eyes. “And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:10 (NRSV)

Christ was born to save! Christ was born for this!

word among us

There was a Christmas card a few years ago that was disturbing to some. Upon first glance, it was the familiar scene portrayed in Sunday school children's Christmas programs – Mary and Joseph in the stable holding the infant Jesus, the shepherds and wise men bowing down in worship, cattle and sheep seemingly in rapt attention at this wondrous birth.

But a closer look at the card revealed an unexpected red stain on the swaddling clothes. The baby Jesus had wounds in his perfect little hands and a wound in his side. The greeting on the inside of the card read simply, "Remember the reason for the season."

1. *What is your reaction to a card such as this?*
2. *How does it "fit" with our traditional celebrations of Christmas?*

The card was troubling at first glance. It didn't fit in with the festive expectations for the season. But the more people thought about it, the more it made sense. The "Christ event"—the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus—is the reason for the season. We too often try to separate the birth from the sacrificial death. The card was a powerful reminder that the birth and death of Jesus are two acts of the same drama. They both point to the central reason for the season. "A body you have prepared for me," the Christ in the book of Hebrews says. "I have come to do your will," he says again and again. "And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10 NRSV)

Christ's willingness to become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary; his willingness to be crucified under Pontius Pilate; his willingness to suffer death and burial – all of it is done for us and for our salvation. Listen for these words when the church confesses the faith in the words of the Nicene Creed; they are central to our faith.

The Christmas card had it right: **Our salvation** is the reason for the season!

3. *What do you believe is the reason for the season?*
4. *What reminds you of the reason for the season?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

There is a certain rhythm to life. The seasons change, the days and years go by. The same could be said about the church. The seasons change—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost—and the days and years go by. But the constant figure throughout all of life and all of the changes is Jesus Christ. We gather among God's faithful people to be reminded of that sure and certain fact.

So much of what we do as we celebrate Christmas can drown out the central message of the angels: To you is born a Savior, Christ the Lord! Christ is born to save! Christ is the reason for the season!

5. *How do you hope Christ is born in you this week?*
6. *What might you do this week to invite others to experience the reason for the season?*

Prayer

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today. Amen

last word

Remember the reason for the season as you celebrate Christmas this week.

Daily Faith Practices

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