



1st Sunday of Christmas (A) – Hebrews 2:10-18

Focus: *The Meaning of Christmas!*

word of life

“Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God...” Hebrews 2:17 (NRSV)

Read Hebrews 2:10-18

Merry Christmas! You have, no doubt, celebrated this week the Incarnation—the Word made flesh—in the birth of a vulnerable baby in Bethlehem. Our lesson for today from Hebrews “fleshes out” the birth of Jesus, identifying just who the baby is, and the meaning and purpose of the Incarnation.

1. *What does the word Incarnation mean?*
2. *Reflect on the phrase “the Word made flesh.” What does it mean to you?*

During December, you have more than likely heard the beloved carols of the season: *Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful* and *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. We will use the words from these two carols to reflect on our lesson from Hebrews. Take a moment to find these two hymns in your congregation’s book of worship and read (or sing) the words. (Hymns #270 and #281 in Evangelical Lutheran Worship)

3. *What phrases in each carol refer to the Incarnation?*
4. *What do you hear in these carols that resonate with the reading from Hebrews?*

A common theme in both the hymns and the verses from Hebrews is the answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” In Hebrews, Jesus is the Son of the Father, the very God who created all things, the One who becomes flesh and blood like us. His willingness to enter into our lives as one of us brings salvation. He is our brother. “For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters” (Hebrews 2:11 NRSV)

The carols sing a similar theme: *“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see! Hail, incarnate deity! Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.”* (*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*)

5. *How is this theme expressed in “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful”?*
6. *What other carol seems to capture the essence of the Christmas message?*

A second theme in our reading for today answers the questions, “What does the Incarnation mean? What difference does it make for us?” Hebrews answers these questions by speaking of Jesus as the “pioneer of salvation” whose death destroys the power of death. In becoming flesh and blood, Jesus becomes one of us as our brother and claims us as children of the Father. “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.” (Hebrews 2:17 NRSV)

Our Christmas carols sound a similar answer to the question. *“Mild he lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise each child of earth, born to give us second birth.”* (*from Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*) *“Born of a virgin, a mortal he comes. Son of the Father, now in flesh appearing.”* (*from Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful*) O come, let us adore him—pioneer of our salvation, Son of God, our brother, faithful high priest, God enfleshed, the babe in Bethlehem, the suffering servant on the cross, Christ the Lord.

7. *How do carols remind you of the meaning of Christmas?*

word *among us*

The scene on the outside panel of the Christmas card looked like any other card depicting the nativity—a stable with hay and animals, Mary and Joseph bending over to see their newborn child, shepherds bowing down to the ground in worship, a star perched in the midnight sky, angels in the background. But this card was different. Upon looking closely at the baby in the manger, one can see bloody imprints on his infant hands and feet and side. The message seen as the card was opened read simply: “Remember the reason he came.”

1. *Have you seen a card like this? What is your reaction?*
2. *Give another example of Christmas art which refers to the sacrifice of Jesus.*

It is a startling message that we don't expect to hear at Christmas. It reflects the greatest Christmas gift ever given. And it is a message the author of Hebrews proclaims. The child whose birth we celebrate in these days of Christmas is none other than the Son of God who came to save and claim us as brothers and sisters.

By becoming one of us, we become one with him, sisters and brothers in Christ, children of God. “Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God...” (Hebrews 2:17 NRSV) For us—for you and for me—Christ was born to save! Christ was born for this!

3. *What does it mean to you to think of Jesus as your brother?*
4. *What difference does it make in your life to believe that Christ was born to save?*

faith practice *in daily life*

Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through word and deed

We speak it each time we profess our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed: “For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.” We live it each time we do an act of kindness or stand up for justice and peace. We embody it each day as we serve others. We reflect it wherever we live our calling as children of God, sisters and brothers of Jesus and whenever someone notices a family resemblance and says, “I see a lot of your brother Jesus in you.”

Through word and deed, we proclaim it. It is the Good News of God in Christ. It's the message of Christmas and of Easter. It's the message of Jesus who becomes one of us so that we might be one with God.

5. *Summarize the meaning of Christmas.*
6. *How might you proclaim the Christmas message during the upcoming year?*

Prayer

Gracious giving God, we thank and praise you for the gift of our brother Jesus who became one of us so that we might be one with you. Grant us your grace that we might through our words and actions proclaim the good news of your coming. Amen

last word

Find ways to proclaim in word and deed
the good news of Christmas.