

IT'S CALLED CHRISTIANITY

There is a story about someone who grew up Christian and then started exploring other world religions, which if done properly, can be a good, and even necessary thing.

Someone asked, *Have you studied the world religion where God becomes human?*

No, that really sounds fascinating. God becoming human what's it called?

The answer, *Christianity.*

God reveals himself in many ways. First of all, he reveals himself through the glory of creation. God revealed himself to Abraham through three visitors and to Jacob by an angel. God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush amidst thunder and lighting on Mount Sinai. Centuries later, God revealed himself to Elijah through a small still voice on the same mountain.

But now through the coming of Christ, through the great mystery that we call the Incarnation, the enfleshment, God has revealed himself by becoming human in the person of Jesus. This is not reincarnation, which has no place in the Christian faith, but the *Incarnation* that is at the heart of the Christian faith. Through the great mystery of the Incarnation, God reveals himself in a way that is off the charts, over the top and out of the ballpark. Now, God reveals himself not just as being around us, not just near to us but as *one of us*. What's the world religion that teaches God has become human? It's called Christianity.

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, as we profess with every creed, was incarnate, enfleshed in the person of Jesus. St. John tells us, *In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. And then, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

That's what we now celebrate. In Jesus, God enters into our world, God becomes human; the immortal one, mortal; the all-powerful one, limited; the creator

a creature. He comes in a real, concrete, visible and tactual way. He comes with a body. He comes truly God and truly human. Truly God because only God can save us and truly human because only another person can save us. And he doesn't just come into the world; he comes into the world as we did: small, naked and helpless and he places himself into our hands. It has been noted that God is so great that he can make himself small.

He comes to unite himself to us. He comes to make a sincere gift of himself, which is to say that comes to love. He comes to sacrifice himself out of love, even unto death, death on a cross.

Jesus comes to sacrifice himself and to follow him is to make a sincere gift of ourselves to him, to sacrifice ourselves and in so doing to find new life. This past year we have been called to make sacrifices for the common good as well as for our own good. And these sacrifices continue. There are less get-togethers and parties, less or even no time spent with extended family. On that first Christmas, Mary and Joseph faced a chaotic situation with no other family around them and yet they welcomed the Christ child and we do the same. In the midst of all the sacrifices we are called to make, this year and always, we strive to welcome Jesus more deeply into our hearts and our lives.

This year we celebrate this Christmas during a worldwide pandemic amidst social and political uncertainty and even unrest. In the middle of all this, it is good, and perhaps even more important, to celebrate Christmas because Christmas is about hope. The birth of a child is a time of hope. The birth of this child is to be a time of great hope. Even in the midst of all the struggles we face, the newborn Christ brings hope—the hope that flows from knowing that God is with us and that now God lives life with us.

The newborn Jesus is placed in a manger, a feed box. He who will say, *I am the Bread of Life* and *My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink*, is born in a town called Bethlehem which means house of bread. Here in the Eucharist the same Jesus born in Bethlehem is born on our altar. Here every day *is* Christmas and here at the Mass he continues to make a gift of himself to us while inviting us to make a gift of ourselves to him.

Will you see him as he continues to enter into our world under the form of bread and wine at every celebration of the Eucharist? He comes to share life with us and he comes to die for us so that we might find new and eternal life in him.

What about the world religion that says God has become human? It's called Christianity. God isn't just out there somewhere. Now God shares life with us. Alfred Delp was a German Jesuit who was killed by the Nazis in the final months of World War II. Years earlier he wrote of Christmas: *On this day, God stepped into our misery and became our brother.* In Jesus, God shares life with us, including our struggles and even in our misery. God has become our brother and so we move forward as a people of hope because Jesus Christ *is* our hope.