

From The Pastor

The fullness of divine light has been revealed in the birth of the Christ. Two thousand years later, we are still adjusting to the brightness of His light. Jesus is the new beginning of God's creation, that is ever new, and without end.

On the surface, Christmas is a wondrous event of faith, engendering love, focusing our attention on an infant who becomes our Savior. The season swells our hearts with love and gratitude for God and for one another as we share in ways well beyond the rest of the year. Images of the season preoccupy us with the sentiments that include God, family, and even an abiding sense for the whole universe.

Just below the surface of what is seen, is the unseen but felt reality of something deep that calls us into a new self-awareness of God and the divine life. What is the theological meaning and effect of Christmas? Being people of high senses, we tend to be satisfied with the surface of what is seen. Now, with Christ having come into the world a whole new life of inner consciousness is known and available to us.

Consider the effect of the Word Made Flesh; God, the divine One accepts a body. The word for flesh in Greek is *sarx*. It means flesh in the sense of our human condition; not only skin and bones, but our lower nature in its incompleteness. It is our basic sense to survive, to satisfy ourselves, to accept what comes easy. It is that part of our nature that is prone to sin, inclined to remain undeveloped and immature.

When the Word became Flesh, all that changed. In his human\divine person, Jesus brings a new consciousness into our humanity. The Greek word *soma* refers to the body or person who is open to growth and development; a willingness to evolve and mature beyond the immediate demands of the flesh. In his body\person, Jesus introduces the possibility of transcendence into human flesh. Now no longer limited to the needs and pleasures of the body, we are drawn to the life of the soul. We now have an active consciousness for things of the divine. The divine, through the Incarnation of Christ, has been infused into our human awareness.

Why is this important? What is the point? In Christ Jesus, we now share the divine life. Through the person of Jesus, and his death and Resurrection, we have received mercy and reconciliation, as well as a place in the Trinity. In Jesus, we have been given a place in the divine person of God.

In today's feast of the Epiphany, the fullness of Christmas is revealed. Too much to take in all at once, the feast is spread over several weeks. Christmas reveals the birth of a baby who is to be the Savior. That is enough for one day. Two weeks later, Epiphany celebrates more completely what kind of Savior the child will be, revealing who this child truly is.

Christmas celebrates the humanity of Jesus, while the feast of the Epiphany reveals his divinity. The three wise men symbolize those who seek the truth. Traveling far and wide, they tirelessly seek the desire of their hearts. Laying eyes on Jesus, their hopes and longings are fulfilled. This infant child is the divine Christ who will be the salvation of Gentile and Jew alike. All who seek with faith will find new life in him. More than the life this world offers, all who look will see the divine life in this child and rejoice in that life as their own.

The Epiphany of Jesus first witnessed by the Wise men is only the initial revelation of his divinity. Later in life, two more events will confirm the identity and the mission of Jesus. The Christmas season concludes with the Baptism of the Lord. This event is the second revelation of the divinity of Jesus, as the Son of the divine Father. It further reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit in anticipation of Pentecost. At the Lord's baptism, his identity is revealed in conjunction with his mission. It is a commissioning for his public ministry that will lead to his death.

Finally, the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee is the third revelation of the divinity of Jesus. In this case, it is for the sake of the disciples who must learn who Jesus truly is, and what kind of Messiah he will be. Further, the image of a wedding serves to express the marriage between God and the world. It is God who unites the world to himself, sharing with us the divine union, through the person of the Son.

Ponder these mysteries and consider how they find expression in your life. We are people with bodies who need security and sustenance, but we are also people of the Spirit who are drawn beyond ourselves to God. No longer stuck with the limitations and immaturity of the flesh, we can now perceive and experience the presence of God within ourselves. Still burdened with sin in the body, we have been freed from its ultimate consequence by Christ who died in the body to set us free.

This is the Good News of our salvation beyond our wildest imagination. Rejoice in the Lord always. Enjoy your precious life. Reach beyond yourself toward growth and conversion, confident of the divine life that lives in you.

Grace and peace for an inspiring year of faith.
Father John Esper