

"The Word Became Flesh"

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

John 1:14b

As soon as Christmas Day was over America started getting ready for our next holiday. In New York City people kicked off our count down into the New Year by gathering in Times Square for a public ceremony. Hundreds gathered for the ritual known as, "Good Riddance." The center point of this ritual was a huge shredding machine into which individuals slipped personalized pieces of paper with 2009 "Good Riddances" written on them. Some of the "Good Riddances" included: my math 101 test; my driving test; my hip surgery; my mother-in-law; Sarah Palin. Good riddance. On my imaginary slip of paper I wrote the words: ice cream, cheese, and spaghetti. Good riddance to twenty pounds of body fat. Good riddance to a high cholesterol count. Good riddance to words that go right to flesh on me. Several days later thousands gathered in that same place to complete our American ritual of ushering in the New Year by watching the ball drop and by counting down the minutes left in the old year. Many brought New Year's resolutions which captured hopes, dreams, and fresh start wishes for the new year.

In church, we are still in the season of Christmastide and we are still actively engaged in a ritual of words for bringing in newness of life. When we gather for worship we say "Good Riddance" to yesterday's sin. Good riddance to a high school's fear based code of silence that taught young men and women to stand by while another teenager beat a fellow student to death. Good riddance to the bully in each of us. Good riddance to fearful darkness . . . then welcome to the Living Word that gives light and life to human beings.

In Christianity: The Call To The Beatitudes, Joan Chittister reflects on Jesus and how the Word of God became flesh in him. *Jewish scripture, the Hebrew Bible, is part of the Christian holy literature, too. Jesus, the Christ, was Jesus the Jew to the end. Jesus did not start a new religion. That came much later. Jesus was a Jew whose*

way of seeing the world drew substantially from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms in which he had been raised and which, as the Evangelists point out, he practiced to the end. He never rejected Judaism---"I have not come to change the law but to complete it," he said quite clearly. "I have not changed one jot or title of the law," he said in another place. On the contrary. Into this environment, Jesus came preaching the God of peace and the God of all creation--as had the great prophets before him. He made no distinction between peoples---"male or female, Jew or Greek, slave or free," as Paul, the first-century Christian missionary, put it. And, true to the tradition, Jesus insisted that the purity laws---the holiness code---be understood to be always in the service of love, human dignity, and equality. Jesus took the scriptures and intensified them in order to expose the heart of them. To those who heard, "you shall not murder," he commanded, "love your enemy." To those who heard, "you shall not commit adultery," he said, "You shall not covet, even in your heart." In Jesus, God was "abba" ---father---as the prophet Malachi had said before him, "Have we not all one father?" Clearly, God was not simply lawgiver. Those whom God created, Jesus argued, God loved. All of them. Equally. Whatever their affiliation---Romans and Samaritans, Canaanites as well as Israelites. He consorted with tax collectors, the very agents of the Roman oppression of the Hebrew people. He dined with the rich, spoke to women, blessed foreigners, consorted with prostitutes, and had a motley band of disciples that included levites, fishermen, tax collectors, even women. In a world made up of hierarchies and hierarchs, of emperors, and serfs, Jesus was the great leveler of society. He became indeed "savior," "liberator," "redeemer" ---in ways no one could have imagined. And the people followed him in droves, this pied piper of a renewed humanity, this prophet of a loving God. Over time, the following of Jesus spawned a world religion that challenges those who make themselves God to remember the mind of God for the world. He preached a godliness that turns the ways of the world upside down. In the Beatitudes, the definition of those whose lives are really blessed, really godly, really happy, Jesus calls each and all of us to be a blessing to the world. He brings us beyond and above the motives that drive a world bent

on power and greed, on profit and control. Instead, he draws for us a template of godly happiness that is based on humility, compassion, justice, mercy, singleness of heart, peacemaking, and the willingness to pour ourselves out, to spend ourselves to make it all happen. Blessed are the poor in spirit, he taught. Blessed are those who mourn, those who are meek and humble of heart, those who hunger and thirst for the sake of justice, those who are merciful, pure of heart, peacemakers. And blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of Justice. And he was. He was a worry to those who saw their social order being undermined, of course, but more than that, he was an irritant to the Romans who feared a promised messianic revolt. In the end, Jesus, the holy one, was "crucified, died, was buried" only to rise again in the hearts and lives and spirits of those who heard his message and waited for his promise to come. These called themselves "Christians," those who believed that the messiah had already come and left them with the work of bringing to completion the coming reign of God (Welcome To The Wisdom of the World, p. 180-181).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In Him was life and that life was the light of men. This Living Word compels us to do what we can to help the hopes, dreams, and vision of God for a blessed future and peaceable humanity come true. It invites us to consider putting--- **work to bring to completion the coming reign of God**--- at the top of our New Year's resolutions. It helps us understand Christian spirituality as an inner seeking of God and an outer walk with Jesus, Rejoice! The Word of Life became flesh. Jesus is still being born again in dark corners of hearts everywhere. Give thanks! Receive new life as you walk with Jesus, Son of God, Emmanuel, Messiah, King of Kings, Prince of Peace, Savior, Lord, Wonderful Counselor, Friend, Teacher, Good Shepherd, Judge, Prophet. Sing in 2010! Proclaim the good news as you work with Him to usher in peace on earth and goodwill towards women and men.

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God, his name was John. He came to witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.