



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
12-25-13

“Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine. Love was born at Christmas, Star and Angels gave the sign.”

Thus starts a poem written by Christina Rossetti in 1885. Love came down at Christmas. That love that came down at Christmas - it came down to us as a baby – a human baby. Love in a human body. In the church we use the word incarnate – the baby Jesus was love incarnate – love in a human body. I’ve always liked that line from the book of Colossians that says, “In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” God dwelling in a human body – God honoring our own bodies by joining us in living incarnate in the midst of us. This isn’t a love all ephemeral and out there in the swirling air – no this is love that can be touched, held, injured, hugged. That’s the same kind of body as you and I live in. We, like baby Jesus, have bodies – bodies that are to be taken care of just like the one Jesus lived in. Our bodies are holy, our bodies are to be honored and cherished. For love came down at Christmas and dwelt in a body.

Love came down at Christmas and was named Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth who had Joseph and Mary as his parents and whose birth was recorded in the census of King Herod. Jesus of Nazareth who had brothers and sisters, who had friends and relatives. Jesus- who learned and fished and traveled and played games and went to weddings and ate and drank and performed miracles. Love came down at Christmas and was an actual person. Again, this love we remember is not a philosophical discussion or a carefully composed myth. The love that dwelt amongst us was named Jesus. And writers and historians can trace his years while on earth and date many important events that happened in the life of this Jesus of Nazareth. His love, his actions, his miracles – there is nothing false or fabled about them.

I can walk over here to the Christmas tree and gaze down at the crèche, the nativity scene placed here and as I look at the kneeling mother, the attentive father, the humble animals and shepherds and the little baby lying in their midst, I feel tender, gentle. Something inside of me feels like saying aaaahhhhh. There are emotions inside of me thinking about that little baby born years ago in a stable. And those emotions – they too are part of love. Love came down at Christmas and was experienced emotionally. A mom, a dad, some shepherds, later people like Simeon in the temple and the wise men when they came to visit – all sorts of folks had emotional reactions to this baby Jesus. And that is a part of love – our emotions, our feelings, our reactions to others. Not only was God’s love born in a human body, and named Jesus – this love was and is about relationships – and relationships involve feelings. We are not people without feelings and that is how it should be. We might have a hard time naming, identifying all the feelings that could

describe love, but even without names those feelings are important to us. The emotions of love, the feelings that bind us to God and to each other- those feelings were also experienced by Jesus. Jesus came to earth and was in relationship with other human beings. Like us, Jesus felt joy and hatred, contentment and suffering, anger and delight. All those feelings that make us human were and are also shared by the divine. We are connected through what we feel and what we share in relationship. It is all a part of that fullness of God dwelling in the midst of us.

Maybe most importantly, Love came down at Christmas to remind us that we need a Messiah, a Saviour. The name Jesus literally means “The Lord is salvation”, Yahweh saves” or Saviour. Jesus came to earth to offer us salvation. Jesus brought a love that offered redemption, hope, promise, eternal joy. The perfect love of the Messiah.

Perhaps the most famous Christmas story in our part of the world, outside of the Bible, is *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. The phrase Bah, Humbug! And the character of Ebenezer Scrooge are known by many of us. While you may not have read or seen the story recently, you might remember that Scrooge is visited one night by some scary ghosts that force Scrooge to see himself as he really is – and the picture isn’t pretty. Scrooge has lived as a selfish, uncaring, mean-spirited, unsympathetic, hard-hearted tightwad. His world has become so narrow that only the Cratchit family still try to have a relationship with him. But once those ghosts come to visit – Scrooge changes completely. He is kind, he renews friendships, gives Bob Cratchit a raise, treats others well. Talk about a conversion, talk about a life redeemed and saved!

And I think that this story remains popular to this day because it is our story. Deep down inside, deeper than others might realize, we can all relate to the character of Scrooge. We know we mess up, we know we have feet of clay, we know we could use help and could use to be converted from self-centeredness to love. To put it more dramatically – we all need a love that saves us- we all need a savior.

*Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love Divine.
Love was born at Christmas, Star and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead, Love incarnate, love divine.
Worship we our Jesus, But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token, Love shall be yours and love be mine.
Love to God and all mankind, Love for plea and gift and sign.*

Love came down at Christmas. Thanks be to God.