

We Are Christmas Eve: The Gift and Risk of Incarnation

We are expecting a God who is arriving as a human being. In that sense, we do not only celebrate Christmas Eve, we are Christmas Eve. The reality of the Word becoming flesh is a gift (*Gabe*) to human thinking, and with this gift comes the task (*Aufgabe*) of thinking, in order to understand what is happening in us and to us when God becomes a human being. Understanding, and thus, an understanding of the Incarnation, is not just one of the undertakings we have to deal with: It is the mode of being a human being in the world. God, the Creator of the universe, made this world into a *domicilium*, a real home for His Word. The Incarnation is *the* great synthesis of the human and the divine.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (J 1:14): Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν. The Word tells us about the essence of the divine architecture: God comes in flesh, to dwell in the world, which was created by Himself. The Word dwells among us, God is with us. God, who is Emmanuel, is a God with us. His reigning is here and now, in our midst: ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν (Lk 17: 21). Here, ἡ βασιλεία can be translated as the reigning of God rather than as the kingdom of God, i.e., not really as the static spatial realm in which his reigning is experienced, since the reigning of God is in the lives of His people, in their hearts. God’s reigning is not executed by external rules imposed by God the law giver, but by the law of God, which is the law of love right up to the highest sacrifice of life on the cross.

Architecture is thus the art of divine and human dwelling. It encompasses the process of planning and building, and as such concerns the whole of being a human being in the world. Into this architecturally organized world enters an incarnated God. In-carnation is about this experience at the level of the lived-in body, not just as a psycho-physical system, but as a living being.

The biblical stories of the Annunciation, Visitation and Nativity inspire us to an understanding that we too can conceive and give birth to Jesus in our very bodies, as Mary herself did. In fact, we are called to become God-bearers, Θεοτόκος, (*Dei Genitrix* or *Deipara*). The heart of Christmas is that Jesus can be born again in the heart of a person, who would like to welcome Him into the world; not only into his or her world, but into the world, in which we live, in the midst of joy and happiness, sadness and sorrow. We only really appreciate the mystery and beauty of the Incarnation when we welcome God again into the world, in a gesture of love.

The gaze of faith allows us to see God embodied in Jesus. Our understanding of the Incarnation helps us to affirm human embodiment. Sensing flesh means to be open to the vulnerability, incapability, and helplessness, but, at the same time, to be grounded in the world. Incarnation teaches us to honor our bodies, and thus the bodies of others. Our bodies tell the story of our life. Listening to the voices of our bodies we can discover the call to be a human being in the world, when transformed by the Incarnation of Jesus. The incarnated Jesus is not a disembodied Spirit, but the Word actually living in the human condition. Jesus’s Incarnation not only encourages, but

empowers us to embody God, who is love, in our lives. This divine empowerment reminds us that we are called to praise beings just because they are.

Czeslaw Milosz, **Blacksmith Shop**

I liked the bellows operated by rope.
A hand or a foot pedal – I don't remember.
But that blowing and blazing of fire!
And a piece of iron in the fire, held there by tongs,
Red, softened, ready for the anvil,
Beaten with a hammer, bent into a horseshoe,
Thrown in a bucket of water, sizzle, steam.
And horses hitched to be shod,
Tossing their manes; and in the grass by the river
Plowshares, sledge runners, harrows waiting for repair.
At the entrance, my bare feet on the dirt floor,
Here, gusts of heat; at my back, white clouds,
I stare and stare. It seems I was called for this:
To glorify things just because they are.

Translated by the author and Robert Hass

Admiring the beauty of the created world, we experience the meaning of belonging. Christmas cannot be reduced to being a festive celebration of human goodness and kindness. The truth of Christmas is that God became a human being for us and our salvation. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (Jn 1:14) The Incarnation encourages us to see the world again in the full splendor of God's creation. Because of the Incarnation everything can be, and is, in fact, theophany, everything is holy, saturated with divine love, mercy, and compassion. Appreciating the signs of grace, we become messengers of hope. In welcoming the embodiment of the Word, we position ourselves toward the Divine and run, like the shepherds toward that light, which illuminates not only that very night of Christmas, but the whole of our life.