

A NOTE FROM FATHER PHIL

As a child, one of the first things I looked for in a church around the holidays was a Christmas creche. The figurines of the baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the kings and shepherds were always bigger than the ones we had at home. My favorite was the outdoor set at St. Alphonsus Church in Grand Rapids. It was nearly life size. I wonder if part of my attraction to these nativity sets was the feeling of warmth and peace that radiated from them. Obviously, the infant was loved by two parents and adored by shepherds, kings, angels and even animals. Lucky kid. My older brother would have gladly swapped me out for a puppy.



The manger scene is familiar and still popular if not historically accurate. It is an amalgamation of the two infancy narratives that are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark's Gospel does not include a story of Jesus' birth. Neither does John's. In that last Gospel there is no story about Bethlehem, no Mary or Joseph in the stable, no singing angels, no praying shepherds, no wandering star, no worshipping kings. Instead, John states simply and profoundly, "The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us." Or as a more literal translation of the Greek would have it: "...and pitched his tent among us."

That one liner is something to ponder and to remember this Christmas. After all, most people do not frequent mangers, have never known a real shepherd, have never heard the voice of an angel, or have been granted an audience with a king. But, we have had a lot of experience with flesh and blood. God has come to us in the embrace of human flesh, in history, and in our world. God really has dwelt among us.

Through the Incarnation, God became part of our eating and drinking, our joys and sorrows, our delights and fears, our passions and boredom, our illness and health, our friendships and hostilities, our certainties and doubts, our play and work, our accomplishments and failures, our dying and death. In these human experiences God is present. But that is not all. The Incarnation is not only about God sharing human life, but about humans sharing the life of God. The Incarnation, the Word Made Flesh, draws us out of ourselves, away from our own self-preoccupation so as to participate in something greater than our own puny lives. Each of us can participate in the very life of God. Because of Jesus, we are partners with God. We are called to put the angels out of business. Now we are the heralds of good news. We announce by our values and choices and behavior that God has become one of us and that God invites us to be one with God.

Therefore, long after the Christmas cribs are put away together with the other holiday decorations, the Word Made Flesh will still be with us inviting us to share in God's life. The One who continues to share in ours.

May all the joy and beauty of that Holy Night in Bethlehem be with you this Christmas and throughout the New Year. And check out the beautiful nativity scenes at Holy Family. The one outside by the generosity of the Knights of Columbus and the one inside that was made possible by some other generous donors!