

God Among Us

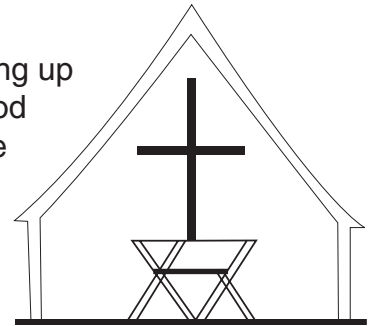
Christmas Message 2006

By Katharine Jefferts Schori

God loved us so much that he came to dwell among us, to tent among us in human flesh... There is a wonderful echo there of God's presence in the tent while Israel wandered in the wilderness. The gift of the Incarnation says that God is willing to take on the human tent of flesh and be one with and among us.



That frail tent of flesh proves capable of holding divinity, but also capable of yielding up its spirit. Irenaeus and Athanasius insisted that the gift of Incarnation was that "God became human, that we might become divine." You and I are bearers of the image of God, and you and I share in Incarnation, for Jesus has walked this way before us. God is born in us as well.



The vulnerability of being born in obscurity, to a peasant refugee couple, in an out of the way place, says to us that God is with us in the smallest parts of life — perhaps a reminder that we, too, may discover God in those humble and unexpected places if we are willing to go in search.

Matthew's story of the wise ones from the east who come searching for this new thing, this remarkable child, is equally a reminder that God's love extends to all, that God comes among us in human form for all humanity, not just for our co-religionists, not just for those who expect God's appearing in the same way we do, and not just in predictable ways at the altar.

Recently I watched and listened to a woman on a bus as she engaged in conversation with a three-year-old boy. The woman asked the child what happens at Christmas, but the boy, though highly verbal, wasn't able to say much. With his parents' apparent agreement, she asked him about Santa Claus, and began to tell him all about waking up on Christmas Day and finding presents. She didn't talk about St. Nicholas on his feast day, or about Jesus and his birth, but she did convey a sense of the wonder and love connected to Christmas.



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That is an opening for those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus. It is the kind of invitation heard by the wise ones from the east. Even Santa Claus — far removed though today's version of the story may be from the holy faithfulness of St. Nicholas — can be another kind of star leading others to the humble stable where God comes among us. God continues to come among us in humility, God continues to be birthed in fragile opportunities that will need to be nourished and tended by others. The little boy on the bus has had his mind and heart opened to hear the bigger story about Christmas. Now, who will tell the old, old story of God's love to those so ready and eager to hear?

— *The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori is Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church.*