

God Became Small

Luke 1:26-38

J.B. Philips wrote a book many years ago entitled; *Your God Is Too Small*. The major premise was that people do not have a wide enough, broad enough, large enough view of who God is. He was of course right. I dare say that everyone's view of God is too small, how could it be otherwise, given the infinite nature of God? We can never totally comprehend the nature of God. Perhaps this is why God became small, coming in a little tiny baby, born to an insignificant peasant girl, in an obscure part of the world, to a powerless people whose only claim to fame was that they believed in One God, Creator of Heaven and earth. God became small so that we might catch a glimpse of God's infinite being.

If you go into the sanctuary of St. George Orthodox Church in Wichita, Kansas you will be struck by all the beautiful murals that line the walls and ceilings. They tell the story of Jesus and Christ's church. In the most prominent spot in the church, right above the altar from which the body and blood of Christ is served is the largest of all the murals. It is not a depiction of God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It is not a picture of one of the disciples or of the saints. They are depicted elsewhere. No, the largest picture in the church is that of Mary.

I am told that Orthodox Christians call Mary the "theotokos," (sp) God bearer. The Orthodox have a saying about Mary, they say her womb "is more spacious than the heavens." This is one way that they express the amazing mystery of the incarnation. Imagine, God somehow being contained with Mary's womb! How could God become so small? Or perhaps we could also ask, "How could Mary's womb become so large?" As William Willimon observes, "The God whose womb bore the world now

is born of Mary's womb to bear the good news of peace on earth." Indeed, Orthodox say of Mary's womb that it was "more spacious than the heavens!"

In the face of such a mystery all we can do is join in Mary's response to the angel's announcement "Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you." Mary's response we are told is one of "**perplexity.**" Again, to the announcement that she shall conceive a child in her womb who will be "the Son of the Most High," Mary responds "**How can this be?**" Good question!

Perhaps the best way to approach the mystery of the incarnation is to think small. This is not easy for us to do. When we think about God we quite rightly tend to think big, really big, bigger than anything in our world or cosmos. It ends up becoming a case of not being able to see the trees for the forest, to reverse an old saying. When looking for God we tend to think of big miracles: parting of the Red Sea kinds of miracles; walking on water kind of miracles; healing the blind and lame kind of miracles, rising from the dead kind of miracles. When we do not experience such grand miracles we may become disappointed or disillusioned. We might even question the existence of God. Perhaps the answer lies in not looking for God in grand, over blown miracles. True, God can be seen in the beauty of a starlit night, in which the Milky Way is stretched before our eyes, but God can also be seen as the poet says, in a grain of sand. Let's face it; grains of sand are far more accessible to us than the Milky Way!

I would like to set aside all the grand theological talk now and invite you to join with me in a consideration of small happenings in the life of this church and this community this weekend. Many of us in the church participated in three small happenings in the this giant world of over 6 billion people. This week many of us took part in:

- the Salvation Army Bell ringing;
- the SOS Food Bank and the
- Community Service Organization toy distribution held at our church.

If you helped with any of these things I would invite you to share with the congregation any small thing that might have been a moment of incarnation for you, an occasion on which you were moved to say “There is a God!” or “Thank you God!” or “Here is a ‘servant of God!’”

(take time to hear people’s stories)

Henri Nouwen, Catholic priest and theologian, wrote about the powerlessness of the Christ child in this way:

“Jesus is God- with- us, Emmanuel. The great mystery of God becoming human is God’s desire to be loved by us. By becoming a vulnerable child, completely dependent on human care, God wants to take away all distance between the human and the divine.

Who can be afraid of a little child who needs to be fed, to be cared for, to be taught, to be guided? **We usually talk about God as the all powerful, almighty God on whom we depend completely. But God wanted to become the all-powerless, all-vulnerable God who completely depends on us. How can we be afraid of a God who wants to be ‘God -with -us’ and wants us to become ‘us-with-God.’** Amen.