

Sermon for Christmas Eve - John 1:1-14

How do you choose your tree? Do you have a plastic one so it's uniform? Do you have a natural one? Is it big enough, or is it too big? Is it neat enough, symmetrical enough and so on? Has it become a competition in your church to try and out-do the previous year's tree and their decorations?

Here's something to contemplate: If you use a living tree, did the tree you are decorating ever have a conscience? When it was growing, did it worry about whether it was growing properly? Did it care how it looked? That it got its branches growing in the right place? Were they full enough, or the right shape?

When we obsess over the decoration of our Christmas tree, are we projecting our own inadequacies onto it?

Perhaps it's a bit irrational to feel inadequate when you're decorating a tree, although we probably think that others are going to analyse us as we are decorating it. Actually, it's quite reasonable for us to feel inadequate, when we measure ourselves against God.

We have reason to feel inadequate because when our first parents, Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the relationship between God and humankind was broken. Humans separated themselves from God.

A word from the Gospel of John.

John Chapter one.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Often the Christmas trees we decorate in church are decorated with Chrismons. Chrismons are white and gold ornaments fashioned in the form of traditional Christian symbols designed to remind us that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birth.

Two of these symbols might seem very odd to be hanging on a Christmas tree. One is a dove; portraying the sacrament of baptism, and the other, a chalice and bread, portraying the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Baptism and Holy Communion. You might be surprised to find baptism and Holy Communion depicted in Christmas ornaments.

Here in these two symbols, we have highlighted for us the Word that is Jesus dwelling among us, God with us, Emmanuel.

We know that Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan, he's not baptised for himself. He's baptised for humanity.

God comes to us. The Word comes to us in Christ's conception and birth that we're hearing about tonight. He becomes human—and so God is no longer far off from us. He is with us. He is one of us.

In baptism, in his baptism, in our baptism, God in Christ joins us to himself.

God doesn't need to be baptised, but humanity needs him to be baptised so that we can be joined to him. So each time we return to our own baptism we see that it is God dwelling with us.

Holy Communion: bread and wine. Here we have Jesus' promise: "This is my body. This is my blood." He still dwells with us. Of course, we cannot physically see him with our eyes, but we still receive his promises and see him with faith.

Because he knows that all humanity is inadequate, Jesus came for us. In fact, the only perfect human to walk this earth is Jesus. That is why he is born of a virgin, so that he is not conceived in the natural way, so he doesn't carry the blemish of sin.

He is a return to the perfection that God created in Adam and Eve. He is a return to God dwelling with his people, so that we can be whole and complete. Through Holy Baptism and Holy Communion Jesus comes to us to dwell with us, to live in us, in the midst of all our trials and sufferings, our failings and shame, our fears and doubts, and in the midst of sin—the sins we commit, and those others commit against us.

In the midst of all of this, our inadequacy is replaced with Jesus' own perfection in baptism and regenerated in us as he dwells in us in Holy Communion.

This Christmas as we celebrate the birth of Jesus our Saviour, we celebrate the birth of the Word made flesh for us, who has come to dwell among us, and in us.

So may the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, forever. Amen.