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Christmas 2A
Peace, Seattle
January 2, 2011 epk
John 1:1-18

A SCALE WE CAN UNDERSTAND

In her book, Bright Evening Star, Madeleine L'Engle asks:[1]

> Was there a moment, known only to God, when all the stars held their breath, when the galaxies paused in their dance for a fraction of a second, and **the Word**, who had called it all into being, went with all his love into the womb of a young girl?
> …Power. Greater power than we can imagine, abandoned, as the Word knew the powerlessness of the unborn child, still unformed…unseeing, unhearing, unknowing. Slowly growing, as any human embryo grows…until the ocean in the womb is no longer large enough, and it is time for birth.

On this first Sunday of the New Year, we continue celebrating that birth—God's great leap from the scale of the infinite to a scale of size we can understand and relate to.

G. K. Chesterton said:
"God became human because God knew we couldn't love anyone we couldn't get our arms around."

2011. As the calendar turns we naturally look back at what's happened in our lives and in our world and wonder what the coming year will bring.

As a kid I remember learning how to clean the chalkboards at school so thoroughly that not a single trace would remain.

And there have been plenty of years (and this one is no exception) I would've been quite content to wake on January 1st and find the dirty slate from the old year wiped clean; and all my errors of judgment, my unfinished projects, my mistakes and my worries scrubbed away.

Have you been there?

And as the New Year dawns, our hopes often rise with it…or try to.

- **Maybe** this will be the year we reach our weight goal, or pay off our credit card debt.
- **Maybe** this will be the year we find our soulmate, or the year we finally reconcile with our estranged sibling.
- **Maybe** this year we'll find the health or happiness that's eluded us.
- **Maybe** this year will be the year…(fill in the blank.)

This morning's gospel reminds us that the God who became flesh in Jesus came into the muddle of all it means to be human. Came into a world where New Year resolutions are often unmet, where the old material from personal lives keeps asserting itself, and where the power-mongering of nations has us living through the same tired scripts once more.

Living as we do in the midst of such a world, God's gift to us isn't one more idea or philosophy. God's gift to us isn't a theological concept or a set of doctrines**.**

God's gift to us is God's own presence, made real and tangible and accessible in the child of Bethlehem.

[1] From Bright Evening Star: Mystery of the Incarnation. Harold Shaw Pub, 1997.

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God's gift to us is coming in this small, vulnerable package, dependent, needy package—something we can get our arms around.

Christmas is about God taking on our flesh, experiencing the human condition, from start to finish. The Incarnation banishes forever any dark notion we may carry that God is apart from us, distant, far off, or aloof.

Where is God?
After Bethlehem, that eternal question has a new answer: God is here; God is with us.

God's gift to us in Jesus is to teach us to see the world, and one another, with the same heart, through the same compassionate eyes, as those with which our Altender God looks at us.

There's a story told about a certain wise Rabbi who had a reputation for asking his students the simplest questions, which often, they discovered, turned out to be the most difficult to answer.

One day, as they gathered around him in the darkness of a winter night to study God's Teaching, he asked them, **How can one know that the night has ended and the day begun?**

> "Could it be that moment," one student suggests, "when you can tell the difference between a sheep and a dog?"
>
> **NO, says the Rabbi, THAT ISN'T IT.**
>
> "Is it when you can see the difference between an olive tree and a fig tree?"
>
> **NO, NOT THAT EITHER, answers the Rabbi.**
>
> IT IS THAT MOMENT, he says, WHEN YOU CAN LOOK AT A FACE NEVER SEEN BEFORE AND RECOGNIZE THE STRANGER AS A BROTHER OR SISTER UNTIL THAT MOMENT, NO MATTER HOW BRIGHT THE DAY, IT IS STILL NIGHT...

Year 2011 is no blank slate. The parts of our selves and our stories that we were eager to part with at the end of 2010 will <u>not</u> be magically cleaned up like a school chalkboard, or reformatted, like a new disk.

Tragedies still stalk the world. Accidents, natural disasters & warring nations are still part of the human condition. But <u>because God resides with us in Jesus</u>, we can discover renewed <u>purpose & trajectory</u> for our lives. <u>Because God is with us in Jesus</u>, we can meet challenges and tragedies with the conviction that our Creator and Lord accompanies us and through the Spirit empowers us to accompany each other with acts of kindness and compassion, justice and joy that <u>bear witness</u> to the Light no darkness can overcome.

Transformation is never automatic, but it becomes possible when we found our hopes and place our trust in the One who came and pitched his tent among us.

The light of Christ is shining this morning. And because this is so, we enter 2011 with a renewed sense of hope for what this New Year might become with him as our light, our companion, our guide.

Amen.