Sermon for the First Sunday of Christmas

December 26, 2021

 On the Sunday after Christmas, we allow the story of Jesus’ birth to take center stage, just as we do on Christmas Eve. We hear that story through the Word proclaimed in speech and music.

 We do this because the story is important. God come to dwell among us, for the purpose of ensuring that all humanity would know God’s salvation.

 Telling stories is a fundamental part of being human. Through story, we not only share information, we create connections between people across time and place. Stories allow us to better understand each other, offering insight into our motivations and emotions, into the ways each of us understands the world.

 Stories allow us to share important things we’ve learned in a way that is more memorable. Stories stick with us because there’s an emotional component to them, an opening to imagine ourselves in the story. Ponder what it was like, how we would have responded.

 We tell the story of our faith, not just on Christmas Eve and the Sunday after Christmas, but every Sunday. As we gather together for worship, just as the people of God have been doing for millennia, we retell the stories of how God has provided for God’s people.

 Every Sunday, we hear the story of the great cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us. And we become a part of that story when we share how our faith has brought us comfort or challenged us to see the world in a different way.

 Luke records a story about Jesus that the other evangelists didn’t include. He tells of Jesus as a 12-year old boy, traveling to Jerusalem with his family for the Passover festival. Luke tells us they did this every year, making the journey on foot with others from their town and nearby towns.

 Having celebrated the festival, Mary and Joseph were heading home. But, as they stopped to rest for the night, they couldn’t find their son.

 Imagine: you are Mary or Joseph. You’ve been entrusted with raising Jesus. There were angels and dreams, shepherds and magi. All of whom made it clear that this child was a big deal.

 And you’ve lost the Son of God.

 Hearing this story encourages us to wonder what it was like to be Mary and Joseph after the shepherds left, after the magi departed. Imagine the responsibility they felt to keep Jesus safe. The conversations they had as they watched him grow up. As they watched him become the man in the stories we hear about him.

 But it also reminds us that Jesus was both fully divine *and* fully human. We tend to be far more comfortable thinking about Jesus’ divinity. But if the Son of God was fully human, then he experienced human things like skinned knees and sunburn. He had favorite foods, he had friends, he had preferred ways to spend his free time.

 And, like other children his age, he learned what it meant to be Jewish through the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Ruth and Naomi, Job, Jonah, Daniel, and countless others.

 Stories like the ones of Jesus’ birth and of Jesus staying behind at the temple, causing Mary and Joseph to worry, invite us to an active response: pondering, wondering, treasuring them in our hearts. They invite us into a deeper reflection of what it means for God to have become incarnate, to dwell among us. What it means for all humanity to see the salvation of God.

 Story and music are gifts from God to help us grow in our faith. They remind us that we are part of something infinitely greater than ourselves. And they invite us to see how *we* are a part of the story.

 Thanks be to God for the infinite and imaginative ways God reaches out to us, and for all those who have told the story so that we may grow in faith.