

“GOD WITH SKIN ON”

by Rev. Daniel W. Randall, Lillian UMC

Christmas can be so wonderful when we keep our focus on the true meaning of Christmas, Emmanuel, God with Us! So, I invite you to close your eyes and picture in your heart the birth of Christ and what Christmas really means. To feel familiar, the sweet voices in the darkness, the comfort of well-sung carols, the anticipation of light spreading warmth in our midst, and those words about a place and time when God was born to us in the flesh. It is a place and a time that can become real again to us. It is a simple Palestinian village where a husband and a wife weep and laugh over a baby, a soft, fragrant baby who looks up with total trust and innocence, waiting for us to take care of Him. Worn-torn shepherds, terrified and electrified by an army of angels lighting up the sky with the transcendent glory of the same God who lies helpless in the manger. How odd and how wonderful! Yes, caught up by the familiarity, we are drawn into the story. And maybe if we let go and sink into it, we can touch, see, and hear this story. Maybe, for a minute that emptiness deep inside of us can be filled by a very real, very living, very loving God.

A little girl was being put to bed by her mother during a loud thunderstorm. As the mother tried to leave, the little girl insisted that she stay to comfort her during the storm. The mother tried to calm the little girl by saying, “God will take care of you. There’s no need to be afraid.” The little girl cried out, “I know Mommy, but I want somebody with skin on!” After all the theological arguments and philosophical debates, what Christmas boils down to is God with skin on, a God who wants to be loved and not feared, a God who becomes human to teach us and invite us to become divine. That which is common becomes holy and we need never be lonely again, we need never be scared again, and we certainly will never be the same again.

When the angels startled the shepherds in those fields outside Bethlehem the angels proclaimed: “This shall be the sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” The shepherds left immediately to find this sign and they were so excited about God breaking into their very human existence. They found a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. In Hebrew whenever this word swaddling appears, it refers to a child who is beloved, who is special, and who is safe amidst the terror of real life. And so, it is with Jesus whose Hebrew name means salvation. This beloved child, safe amidst the terror of a Herod-filled world, is swaddled salvation, tightly wrapped wholeness. This child is God’s promise, tangible and visible. It is God with skin on. Can you see the baby? Reach out and touch Him. When you do you are touching God and being touched by God. For you too are safe, precious, special, beloved. Through your baptism you have become one with Christ and you have become a bit of God with skin on to others. There are swaddling cloths of grace wrapped tightly around you. Can you feel them? They are there to keep you safe, to keep you warm, and to tell you just how beloved you are. But then, please look in the manger one more time. What you see is not just God it is all the people for whom salvation has come. You see those for whom God sent Jesus for, because God so loved the world. Brothers and sisters, we can get through all the dark nights of the soul, because God is here, swaddling us with grace that holds us tight and keeps us safe, so that we can become the presence of God for others. Our God is a God with skin on and He is here with us. Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His Name Is Called Emmanuel; God with Us, Revealed in Us; His Name Is Called Emmanuel.