

**Christmas 1**  
**1/1/2023**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**Numbers 6:22-27**

**Psalm 8**

**Philippians 2:5-12**

**Luke 2:15-21**

**God who enters history**

Sermon preached by Matt Julius

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*God, may my words be loving and true; and may those who listen discern what is not.  
Amen.*

What does it mean for God to enter history?

What does it mean for God? And what does it mean for history?

We are perhaps comfortable with the two touch points of God in history set out in two of our readings for today. Perhaps in part because they speak of something that is not quite history: something long ago, to be sure, but not the history of documentaries, newspapers, and academic texts.

God enters history in the act of creation. Ordering the world, and human beings within it, in a grand act of grace and freedom. Many can sit easy with a God who enters history through the whisper of the wind, the ancient forming of galaxies, the mysterious something which makes the world tick.

And we can well enough get our heads around the touch point of God's presence in the holy of holies. In the tabernacle, and temples dedicated to the Lord. In God's bearing with the Jewish people, through their long history. Perhaps there is a sense of God's people as an ancient, almost mythic past, that no longer impinges on the present. ... Of course, that cannot be true, when the people of the unspeakable divine name were subject to unspeakable evil.

Nevertheless, God entering history in quite abstract ways can be enough. Through the long ago creative act — the wind breathed into those first embers of creation. The long ago sacred site, where God was present as if only as a rumour.

But when God enters history in flesh and blood, as a person. When the haziness of more ancient texts gives way to a frightfully recent picture of a person. Albeit not a direct, unvarnished window, but something more ... tactile.

When God enters history not simply as an unspeakable name, an ancient whispered wind, a sacred presence ... When the holy unspeakable name takes on a face, and flesh, and a familiarity: Yeshua, Jesus, Jesus. This anointed One. The holy name now wholly speakable.

What does it mean for God to enter history in this way?

What does it mean for God? And what does it mean for history?

There is in our two New Testament readings two accounts of this history. The rather mundane story of a Jewish child undergoing their rites of passage. And the grand history, as if from God's own view, in one of the earliest confessions of faith for which we have a record.

In the grand theological history of Philippians there God is emptied out, God empties God's own self out. As one theologian puts it, it is the story of God's journey to the far country, and then the journey home. As if, could it be, God ceases for a moment to be God. Letting go of eternal equality with God the Second Person of the Trinity becomes human, takes on the form of a slave.

The theological question, with which early Christians wrestled is:

Whether God must cease to be God in order to enter history? In order to take on human flesh, human face, and human name?

The early Christian wrestling with this question responds with a resounding, "No!"

At one of the early councils of the church at Chalcedon the formulation was offered:

One divine person, with two natures: human and divine, neither confused nor separated.

Jesus never ceasing to be divine, never ceasing to be human.

But perhaps we can go further than this. It is not simply that the divine person takes on a human nature, as if there were a question of whether there ever would be an incarnation. Rather, God so entwines God's being with our human life, through the human life of Jesus, that we cannot think of God apart from this one.

Hear these words of Scripture: "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God, in love." (Ephesians 1:4)

In just the same way we cannot think of God as other than the one whose being flows through creation. That ancient wind which flared the embers of creation to a guiding and abiding flame.

In just the same way we cannot think of God as other than the one who brought liberation to a people born of grace and freedom — God who speaks through Psalms and prophets.

In just this same way: we cannot think of God as any other than this one who is emptied, this one who takes the journey into the far country, our home. We cannot think of God apart from the entry into human history. In freedom and grace God chooses that divine destiny would be bound up with our human being: our history, your history, my history. In Jesus we see coming to fruition the God of all creation who seeks to make a home in the far country, to make a home in our home.

There is only God in this fragile child among humanity. Heralded by shepherds and strange sights in night skies — as if entering the layers of sacred stories which hold the precious memory of his own people's history. There are no accidents here.

When Jesus comes to be circumcised we are led to see this as a new child taking their place among God's people. Tying the child's fate and future to God.

And yet, it is not a child who is taking their place within the people of God. Rather, here is God taking his place among the people. God freely and willingly binds divine destiny in this moment to human care. So fully does God give of herself in this Child that God becomes vulnerable to these figures of history, subject to their care.

Here the history of God's people is inverted. It is no longer that God's people can not exist apart from God's sustaining power; here God can not exist apart from the people. Into their hands, into our hands, God offers God's very self and child.

This is the ultimate demonstration of God's self-giving love. Not simply that God would love us, but that God in an act of freedom and grace, chooses to be no other God than the one who embraces our humanity. God in freedom and grace chooses to be no other

God than the one who is present with us, even in our frailty and vulnerability. God is no other God than the one who makes the journey to the far country, our home.

Ecce Deus. Behold God!

Let us then go all the way with our proclamation today of the Good News. The unspeakable holy one of old has now placed the name of Jesus on our lips.

So let us go all the way with our proclamation of the journey home. The God who binds divine destiny to our humanity gives Godself to us, but does not give herself away.

Gathered around this child in history is the tender love of parents. And this tender love responds to the self-giving love of God heralded by shepherds. And this tender love has echoed throughout history, it has touched the lives of each of us.

We, then, are the sign of renewal. However partial, fleeting, or fragile we have received this same divine love which has reverberated through the millennia. We have been grafted into the history which begins with this child and has been carried to today. We are gathered in this place to proclaim God's presence with us.

So friends here is the Good News:

God has arrived and placed a name on our lips: Jesus, the Messiah — anointed One that we may all be anointed.

And we are anointed with the love that kindled the stars  
The love that led the march of liberation, that sounds the call for justice

And we are anointed with the mercy that binds the broken  
The peace that lies ready to be discovered in the heart of the world  
The joy that breaks free everyday

This is the Good News:

God is with us, the divine destiny bound to our human history.  
That every one of us may bow in wonder, and every tongue confess that love reverberates through the world.

And even at the end of our own fragile, fleeting moment.  
God is with us in the sunset and the dawn of the new life.

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