

Christmas homily.

I apologize for using the wrong gospel reading for this evening. Usually we proclaim Luke's version of the birth of the Lord with shepherds and angels and Mary and Joseph and the Christ child.

But this evening, on the feast of the Birth of Jesus, we proclaim the beginning of the Gospel of John.

To get a good insight on how John's gospel looks at Jesus' coming into the world, we need a different perspective. Just a moment. (Walk to the back of the sanctuary.) All right now I'm ready!

And the first words announcing the in John's gospel are: IN THE BEGINNING...

No shepherds here, no angels, no Mary or Joseph or even a new born babe.

Just three words: IN THE BEGINNING. Where have you heard those words in scripture before? (Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:1) In the beginning God created the world. John is giving us a cosmic picture of the birth of Christ. Like out of a Star Wars movie.

In the beginning God created every living thing in Genesis. John tells us that in the beginning, even before anything was created, IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning.

And what did this WORD who was God and who created all the living things, ... all the plants and all animals... created us in his image and likeness... what were the first words God said in genesis? God said, ‘It is good’. To all the plants, “It is good”, to all the animals, “It is good!” and to the creation of man and woman the pinnacle of all creation, created in God’s image and likeness ...it is very good!

Then comes the great cosmic battle between good and evil, or as St. John puts it, between light and darkness. And all of God’s wonderful creation was caught in the middle of the battle.

But the Word, who created us VERY GOOD, saw us caught in the struggle between darkness and light, and so the Word became flesh, pitched his tent among us so that we could see his glory, a light that would dispel all the darkness that invades our lives.

(Pause)

Yes, my brothers and sisters, that is the Gospel of John's take on the Christmas story. God did not get rid of the darkness that can surround us and overwhelm us; Gods simply overwhelms the darkness with brilliant light.

So what does that have to do with Christmas; what does that have to do with OUR celebration of Christmas 2014? Let me tell you a story.

I stopped over to the Rainbow Room the other day to visit the Story St. Vincent de Paul Society workers who were giving out food and gifts to 91 families in the community. One of the workers asked me to speak to a woman who was there. She was a middle aged woman whose tears had begun to dry on her face. The woman shared with me her hurt. She said she was blessed to have a home to live in and heat and lights and food. But there was still something deep within her which was hurting. She needed healing at a spiritual level.

We prayed for a while a prayer I felt quite inadequate to find the right words and then we gave each other a humungous hug which seemed to express compassion in a way words could not.

It is for such souls that the Word became flesh and he pitched his tent among us and we saw his glory. He came to reveal the compassion of his Father.

What does it mean for Word to pitch his tent among us? Jesus spent his whole life trying to explain what pitching his tent in our midst meant. He often told stories so that, in time and through prayerful reflection, we might get the idea of what he was talking about. Here's an example of one of his stories about pitching his tent.

We all know the parable of the Good Shepherd.

The good shepherd leaves the 99 sheep to seek out the lost one. I don't know about you, but I might have just left it alone and made sure I got the 99 home safe. Then after finding the lost one, he gently places it on his shoulders and carries it back to the rest. That is surely not how I would have reacted. I would have probably given it a quick kick and pushed it along until it got back with the flock.

And then, what does the shepherd do when he gets back to his home? He calls all the other people around him together to rejoice that he has found his lost sheep! I would have probably plopped into my lazy boy and had something to drink. I surely would not have thrown a party to celebrate the one who had been lost. But then again, Jesus came to pitch his tent among us. He came to reveal the very heart of his father.

Yes, Christmas story is about angels and shepherds and Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child.

But it is also about our great God who chose to pitch his tent among us.

He chose to be the light in our darkness, a light which no darkness can overcome.

And of his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.