



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church

1309 R Street Lincoln, Nebraska 68508 (402)474-1979 www.stmarks-episcopal.org

The Rev. Jerrold Thompson

Sermon for the First Sunday of Christmas (Year C, Revised Common Lectionary)

St. Mark's on the Campus

December 31, 2006

THE THEME OF “BEGINNINGS” runs throughout our readings this morning.

When I say that, the vestry members who were present at our retreat at the beginning of Advent are probably wondering if they will have heard some of what I have to say this morning, and indeed you will have!

Beginnings. “In the beginning was the Word.” In the beginning. At creation. With his words, John deliberately summons to our minds the opening chapters of Genesis:

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth....”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

As the early Christians struggled to explain the encounter they had with God in Jesus, this was one of the ways they expressed it: that the Word—*Logos* is the Greek word, the Greek concept for the driving force, the primary force that makes *God God*—in

Jesus, that force took on human flesh and blood. It was a kind of beginning for God as well as a beginning for creation. “The Word became flesh and lived among *us*....And to all who received Him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, *not* of blood or of the will of the flesh...but of *God*.”

A new beginning for the all human race, living and dead. There’s the line in the Apostle’s Creed—the creed we say in the daily office, not in the Eucharist—the line, “He descended to the dead.” The significance of that line is not simply that Jesus died but that he offers the loving forgiveness of God for *all* of us to trust in—all of the human race, all of creation, from the beginning.

In other words, what is true in Jesus has always been true and always will be true, part of “the glory of God” we see in the one who is “full of grace and truth.” No part of existence is devoid of the love of God unless *we* make it so—and even there—as at the cross—God’s love will ultimately triumph.

The history of God’s people has been about God’s redemption and God’s victory in new beginnings: we hear that redemption and victory in Isaiah this morning: “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch....You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD shall give you.”

We hear it in our Psalm as well: “The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel; he heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds....The LORD lifts up the lowly, but casts the wicked to the ground.”

And again in Galatians: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children....So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.”

In the beginning, when God created. And throughout history, God has continued to create and is creating something new even at *this* moment. New possibilities based on the promises of God, promises as old as the creation itself, even older.

As a new calendar year dawns, we’re also reminded that with beginnings sometimes come endings; in this case, the end of 2006, and the beginning of 2007. As is true about most endings and beginnings, we might grieve the passing of the old or be delighted to embrace the coming of the new—or perhaps most often, a bit of both.

Depending on our politics, we might feel hopeful to have a new congress taking shape with the new year as the old Congress passes—or we might feel more cautious. 2007 might be the year that we graduate with that long desired degree, or retire, or get married, or discover within ourselves a renewed trust in God.

Times of the new beginning, and times of the old passing. Times of joyful anticipation and times of grieving, too. Some things 2007 will bring we can anticipate ahead of time and others we do not see coming. It was the same for God “in the beginning.” God could not anticipate all that would result from this new creation, any more than we can anticipate everything that might come about from embryonic stem research or the ability to alter genetic history. It depends—as it always has—on the wisdom and the faithfulness we exhibit as *we* create new beginnings alongside God.

Whatever 2007 brings to us, I pray that we remember that God is involved in it all, continually drawing us and the world toward Himself, and toward the great culmination of all things in the Word made flesh, our LORD Jesus Christ. To Christ be glory for ever and ever, and throughout the coming new year.

Amen.