

Christmas Day III
John 1:1-14

All I Want for Christmas Is You^{*}

The Rev'd Dr. Patrick S. Cheng
The Church of the Transfiguration
December 25, 2017

Merry Christmas! The waiting is over. Night has turned into day. Darkness has turned into light. And Christ our savior is born: in Bethlehem, over two thousand years ago, and in our hearts today.

There are so many wonderful things about Christmas Day. Spending time with loved ones. Opening presents. Enjoying festive meals. And, of course, the music. This morning we sing a number of glorious hymns such as “It came upon a midnight clear,” “O little town of Bethlehem,” and “Joy to the world.” It doesn’t get better than this!

But I do have a confession to make. One of my all-time favorite Christmas songs is actually not in the 1982 Hymnal. In fact, on its surface, the song doesn’t seem very religious at all. It’s “All I Want for Christmas is you” by Mariah Carey.

I suspect most of you know this song. It’s been described as one of the few recent Christmas songs that deserves to be added to the Christmas canon. It’s a love song, and the lyrics go like this:

I don’t want a lot for Christmas
There is just one thing I need
I don’t care about the presents
Underneath the Christmas tree
I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas is you.

Now Mariah Carey might not be on your top-ten list of Christian theologians. But perhaps she should be. The song is actually quite profound from a theological perspective. Most of us think of this song as a love song from one person to another. But what if we understood it as a love song from God to us? What if this song was God saying to us on this beautiful morning: “All I want for Christmas is you”?

Today’s gospel reading is the prologue, or the opening verses, from the Gospel According to John. These verses are some of best-known lines from scripture: “In the

^{*} Copyright (c) 2017 by Patrick S. Cheng. All rights reserved.

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” Most scholars think that John’s prologue was taken from a song – not a top-ten Christmas megahit of course, but an ancient hymn in the early church about the incarnation.

Now some might think that John’s prologue is an odd choice as the gospel text for our Christmas Day mass. After all, John doesn’t mention Bethlehem, the manger, the shepherds, the angels, or even the Holy Family. In fact, the reading sounds more like an abstract philosophical treatise than anything else. You might be scratching your head and asking: What does any of this have to do with Christmas?

Well, the answer is: Everything. Through the incarnation, the almighty and all-powerful creator of the universe – the One who was there at the beginning of time itself – emptied himself and took the form of a tiny, helpless baby. Now this baby was not born into a household of wealth, royalty, or political power. Rather, this baby was born to traveling, migrant parents in a smelly and filthy manger that was located in some remote, back-water part of the world.

So why did the Word become flesh in this incredibly peculiar way? The answer is: Because God loves us “more than we could ever know.” God wanted to be with us. God wanted to experience first-hand what it meant to be truly human. Not only the joy, but also the sorrow, pain, loneliness, and messiness of human life. And so God took the form of the Christ child to say to us: “Nobody – absolutely nobody – is too small or too insignificant to fall outside of the scope of my love.”

Although there was no room at the inn for the baby Jesus on that very first Christmas, Jesus ended up making room for others during his life, especially for the outcast and those on the margins. In the words of the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann:

Christ squeezed in anyway, made room in the inn, in the village of Bethlehem, and in the world. The Christ Child defied the [innkeeper’s] verdict of “no room” and made room for many more.

But even more importantly, the “Word became flesh and lived among us” so that we in turn could become divine. The early church fathers and mothers talked about the *admirabile commercium*, or the “wonderful exchange.” Think of it this way: Christmas is the most wonderful gift swap of all. God became human so that we humans could become divine. In the incarnation, God became a child so that we could become children of God. A wonderful exchange, indeed.

That is the true miracle of Christmas. The Word became flesh so that we could become – as John says – “Children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.” And, as we heard in today’s Collect of the Day, the Word took “our nature upon him” so that we could become “born again” and be made God’s children “by adoption and grace.”

In other words, the incarnation is a love song from God to us. The incarnation is God's way of saying: "All I want for Christmas is you."

So as you spend this day with your loved ones – and as you unwrap the presents "underneath the Christmas tree" – I invite you to reflect upon the true miracle of Christmas. God became human so that we could become divine. God became a child so that we could become children of God. Through the incarnation, God says to us:

I just want you for my own
More than you could ever know
Make my wish come true
All I want for Christmas is you.

Merry Christmas!