

December 18, 2005 – Fourth Sunday of Advent
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Where can we find... the newborn King?”
Matt 2:2 (THE MESSAGE)

Next week we will celebrate the birth of the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus.

John 1:1-5, 14 NLT

In the beginning the Word (Christ) already existed. He was with God, and he was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. 4 Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. 5 The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.... the Word (Christ) became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived here on earth for a while. He was crucified as a sacrifice for our sins, He arose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in His people, the Church. This advent we are answering the question: “Where can we find... the newborn King?” Jesus is found:

1. In you. Jesus is found in our hearts as we repent and believe in Jesus and live a holy life empowered by His Holy Spirit in us.
2. In others as we minister to them in Jesus name.
3. In worship. As we retell the salvation story, we not only remember Jesus but Jesus Himself is present.

Today...

4. In the Church as the Believers unite in love, using their spiritual gifts for the good of the church (also called the Body of Christ).

Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul says, (1 Cor 12:27-NIV) “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

Jesus is found in the church, it is called the Body of Christ. But Jesus is found in the church only when the church is being the church. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, using the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us for the good of the body, then we are part of the body causing it to function properly.

How are we a part of it?

1 Cor 12:4-7 NLT

4 Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. 5 There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. 6 There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us. 7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

(v4) Different kinds of spiritual gifts, but same Holy Spirit Who is the source of them all. We don't all have the same gifts, but everyone has at least one gift. We are given different gifts so that the church will have all that is needed to function. Just as a body needs all it's different parts to function properly (head, arms, hands, feet, nose, eyes etc.) so the church needs different parts (it needs gifts of evangelism, prophecy, teaching, exhorting, serving, mercy, giving, administration...oh yeah, of pastor too). There are different kinds of gifts. What if everyone was a teacher? That's like saying what if all the parts of your body were a foot? How would you see or hear? Everyone has a different gift, but it is the same Holy Spirit Who is the source of them all. The Spirit gives gifts as He chooses. He gives each believer a gift that motivates you and you are needed for the church to function properly.

(v5) Different kinds of service or places to serve in the church, but same Lord we are serving. We have different kinds of gifts and different places in the church to use those gifts (evangelism ministries, teaching Sunday School or a Bible Study, visiting and praying for the sick, sitting on a board, helping in many small tasks that need to be done around the church). Each member of the church needs to find a place to serve the church with their gift or gifts.

Your responsibility is to know and use your gift in the church, but the results in the lives of those you minister to is up to God.

(v6) Different ways *God* works, but same God who does the work through all of us. The results of our serving and using our gift is up to God we just need to be faithful.

In a church where its members are using their spiritual gifts for the good of the church, we find Jesus, for a properly functioning church is the Body of Christ. He is the head of the Body and we are all a part of His Body.

The Body does not work against itself. That's what cancer or some other sickness does, it attacks the body, it takes from the body. But a healthy cell gives to the body making it whole. In the same way there must be unity in the church. Jesus Himself prayed for this very thing (John 17:20-21 NLT) "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father--that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me."

The thing that binds us together is love. The Bible has many "one another Scriptures" Serve, forgive, submit, encourage, remain faithful to, support one another and of course what sums it all up is love one another.

(1 John 4:12 NLT) No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us.

Where do we find Jesus? God live in us when we love each other. People find Jesus when His followers are loving one another.

Loving one another may need to begin with the necessity to forgive another. Jesus taught that our daily prayer should be (Matt 6:12,14,15 NLT) “and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.

14 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Jesus taught, if we do not forgive others we cannot be forgiven.

(What follows is based on a article: Appreciating God's Gifts at Christmas
Find God's distribution system – by Henry Cloud, Ph.D.)

Our relationships with each other should be more than what we often mean by "fellowship," which usually means hanging out in church over coffee and bagels. The Greek word for fellowship used in the Bible actually means things like: involvement, social interaction, sharing in common, support, communication, communion. Think of it this way. The Bible is actually saying that to participate, know God, receive His benefits, communicate with all of Him, and be the recipient of all He has to offer, we have to have community, or fellowship with each other. In other words, to get all that He has to offer us spiritually, we need each other!

Why? Because we have an "incarnational God" and an “incarnational Gospel.” That means that God took on a human body to express Himself. This is what we celebrate every Christmas (Johm 1:14) “[Christ] became human and lived here on earth among us.” Except it goes farther than this. He continues to live among us in His Body of believers, and that Body literally distributes the things of God within itself.

(John 1:14) “He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.” Where do you get His love? In part, from loving each other. Likewise, where do you get grace? From each other. Encouragement and strength? Same answer. Truth? Same. And on and on. How do we know this? The Bible tells us. Peter puts it this way: (1 Peter 4:10 NIV) “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”

Think of that. God wants to give us His grace in all of its various forms, but delivered through each other as we are in deep community. It is through community with each other that we find the experience of a lot of what the Bible tells us that God wants to give to us. We cry out for His strength, but we are supposed to be strengthening each other, forgiving each other, encouraging each other, confronting each other. We cry out to find God, yet we neglected being involved in the Church, the Body of Christ. Jesus said,

(Matt 18:19-20 NLT) "If two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I am there among them."

So, to just read about His love and grace is not all there is. If there is a gap between what you have learned, or read, and stored in your head, then it may be that you are not getting it delivered to you through the distribution system of His body, in community with other believers. Look at your spiritual life. Does it include deep sharing and community with others that really gets below the surface, where you need it? There is no better time to start doing this than the Christmas season. This is the ultimate gift distribution! Recognize those around you in the church as God's gift to you.