

Meadowbrook Congregational Church
“Word Made Flesh”
December 24, 2009
Reverend Art Ritter

I was speaking to a colleague this week who said that he had spent most of the past few days talking to his grandson about Santa Claus. It seems that the young man had heard that Santa did not exist and he grew quite concerned. He needed some reassurance that his Christmas was going to be just fine. He needed to know that Santa was real. He looked to his trusted grandfather for the answers that he needed.

We must admit that we share this young man's need for reassurance in many mysteries of our life. We are living in a time of war and under the threat of terror. We are living at a time of H1N1, climate change, and shortage of clean water and healthy food. We are living in a time of economic uncertainty, when layoff and shutdown has affected us all—some all too personally. We are living in a time when we worry about the future of our jobs, our businesses, our schools, our communities, and our church. We are living in a time when many have questions of health, or concerns about the health of a loved one. We are afraid. We have doubts. We want to be reassured that everything will be all right.

I have shared this story with some of you before. I have no trouble identifying my most memorable Christmas present ever. I received it for Christmas in 1983. I had met a certain woman the previous summer and we had been dating for about six months. I was a student minister in St. Johns, MI. This woman was two short months away from completing her dietetic internship in Detroit and for all I knew was planning to return to her home in Colorado or perhaps move to the warm climate of her dreams in Arizona. I was a bit uncertain about the future of our relationship. I was scared about making a commitment with someone who wasn't going to be around much longer. I was too fearful to even talk about it. I was afraid.

Since we were both students, we had agreed not to spend much money on Christmas presents. I purchased for her a rather simple but attractive sweater. It was a rather practical gift. But the gift I opened from her on Christmas morning was neither inexpensive nor practical. It was something about which I had only dreamed. It was an official Detroit Tiger warm-up jacket. Back then it cost over \$75. I learned later that this woman had saved meal money and had borrowed money from friends to pay for it.

I have treasured this jacket for years, even though it doesn't quite fit anymore. I treasure it because of what it said. It spoke to me reassurance, the promised presence of a certain one. It said to me, “See here, this is how much I love you. This is how much I think of you. This is what you mean to me. I am here with you now and I will be with you into the future.” That jacket was a sign of promised presence, of reassurance I could see, hear, and most of all understand and trust. It was word made flesh.

When God was ready to give humanity a gift, God turned out to be a very unique gift-giver. God realized that to really communicate the idea of love and trust, God needed to come closer to us. We didn't need more of the riches of the earth. We didn't need something else from the abundant shelves of heaven's store. God's gift needed to be really personal. God's gift came to us in person, neatly wrapped in a tiny child.

The gospel of John describes the birth of Jesus in this manner, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." The gift of Christmas was God's presence, the very essence of God in the midst of our life's complications, worries, and fears. It was God coming, not in the pages of a book or in a picture in a temple, but in a person who laughs and cries and hungers and celebrates as we do. Reassurance is what this gift offers; the reassurance of the promise of God in the swirl of our minutes and hours and days. The gift was the word of love made flesh, something we could see and hear and understand and feel and trust.

May the gift of your dreams be under the tree this evening. But most importantly may we all remember this night that the most important gift of all is already ours, the gift of God's presence, word made flesh. Now we can hear God. Now we can better understand God. Now we can live our lives giving back to God and others, our word made flesh.