

A Reflection on the Fourth Week of Advent

An Ordinary Incarnation

If anything, Christianity – and especially Catholicism – takes human flesh seriously. Our central mystery is the Incarnation – God's "enfleshment," the necessary condition for the life and teachings of Jesus, his redemptive death, and his glorious resurrection.

God marries our human flesh and finiteness. In Jesus the eternal Word of God becomes wombed in time. Thus, we who bear this name and live his life are a people who see the transcendent in the particularities of names, places, historical events.

To others, our faith and practice may seem embarrassingly concrete and physical.

I remember a non-Christian woman, after weighing the possibility of becoming Catholic, saying to me, "But it seems all so primitive, so fleshy."

It is strange, when you think of it. We celebrate conceptions, circumcisions, and purifications; we ritualize marriage so highly that some of those who have left our communion are struck by the leanness, even barrenness, of some other marriage ceremonies. Births and deaths we linger and pray and play over. Food and blood characterize our Eucharists.

It is unsettling for many – and sometimes for us – that God would penetrate and inhabit our ordinariness. It might be more reassuring if our Baby-God had sprung fully matured from the head of Zeus, instead of appearing in the midst of such inadequacy and vulnerability. Sure, we have the angels, but they tell us merely to "fear not." And they point, like the star, to things so utterly undramatic and common as a makeshift bed and plain people.

*It is unsettling for many – and sometimes for us –
that God would penetrate and inhabit our ordinariness.*

