

THE AFTER CHRISTMAS CHOICE

John 1:29-41 Epiphany 2

About this time last week, many of us were taking down our Christmas trees, putting our presents away, vacuuming up pine needles, and cleaning up after Christmas.

Following Christmas, there is the usual deluge of Boxing day sales, the finishing up of left-over turkey, a few days of holidays, New Year's and then it's back to school or work. Christmas is over for another year.

—And just as we were getting into it, too!

But Christmas does not have to end. It was not meant to end. Christmas is, rather, the beginning of something big.

Just because the world around us treats Christmas as a shallow façade of a holiday that wears off by January 1 does not mean that we need to. We can put the tree and tinsel away, but that does not mean that Christmas should be forgotten by our heart.

Christmas is about God entering our world—of him coming to live life as one of us—as flesh and blood just like us. That is not something we should only celebrate for a couple of weeks every year. Rather it is something we should celebrate every day of the year.

In fact, if we ever want Christmas to be meaningful for us, it is the rest of the year that helps us appreciate what Christmas is really about.

In our Gospel today, we find John the Baptist knowing what Christmas is all about. “Look,” he says pointing to Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

The next day again, John tells his followers, “Look, the Lamb of God.” John states a simple fact; there is no hard sell, no hard-core persuasion, no intense lobbying or debate or argument in an attempt to get people to believe in Jesus. There is only a simple straightforward proclamation of a simple straight forward fact, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

After John's testimony, two of his followers left to follow Jesus.

But why go? What did Andrew and this other man expect to get by following Jesus? What led them to follow this man? They believed they had found the Messiah, the Saviour, but so what?

Perhaps they expected to obtain wealth, or power or prestige, or honour? Perhaps they thought it would be fun—a good experience?

Hardly! As Jewish men, they knew all the Old Testament passages which told about the Lamb of God. They knew all about the Passover Lamb. They had been

taught all about the suffering servant songs in Second Isaiah and the illustration of a lamb led to the slaughter.

To call someone the Lamb of God as John had called Jesus was not an illusion to worldly power or riches. The two men who left to follow Jesus expected none of these things.

So why go? If they did not expect power or riches, why follow? Why indeed!

I think they went because they were called to go. They went because they knew that life would be unfulfilled unless they gave themselves completely to God.

They knew that the illusions of fulfillment which the world offers—wealth, power, family, prestige, popularity—that those things are just that—illusions. For Andrew and the other, they did not know where God would take them, but they knew that by following, they would find fulfillment.

If that road led to riches, then riches would be fulfilling. If that road led to suffering, then suffering would be fulfilling. *The fulfillment came, not because of what happened to them, but because they were following God.*

Then why go? They went after Jesus because they knew that there was no other road that offered fulfillment.

Today we hear that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” How do we respond? Christmas has come. Christ has entered our lives. How do we respond to that?

Do we go or not? Do we follow Christ—not necessarily in the sense of packing our bags and leaving home—but definitely in the sense of living our lives for God? How do we respond?

I think that how we respond depends on how we see God. Many of us have fallen into an illusion that contentment comes from wealth, from family and from the social and economic values which we take from the world around us. For these people, the call of God makes us uncomfortable because we see it as a call to fanaticism. We see it as a call to give up everything that we value.

We will believe in God only so long as there is no commitment, no cost, no sacrifice, no challenge to our false illusions of contentment, and no call to “Go!” If we are ever asked for more, then we are tempted to put away our faith just as easily as we put away our Christmas tree.

Some of us respond to Jesus invitation to “Come” with that Vietnam protest chant: “Hell, no, we won’t go!”

So comfortable are we in the life we have built that we are more prepared to live an illusion than in accepting the offer of real fulfillment.

But there are also those among us who, when they are introduced to the Lamb of God, set down everything and go. Their fulfillment comes from walking with God. Their meaning and existence are wrapped up in the fact that they do not journey through life alone. God is their guide.

Their joy comes when they proclaim the Lamb of God to others through their words and actions. Their life is not consumed by some false illusion, but rather it is filled with a closeness to God.

There are people for whom Christmas lives on.

“Look, the Lamb of God.” Christ has entered our world at Christmas. Now is our chance to decide how we will respond. We are invited to follow.

We are invited to walk with God Why go? Because we are chosen; we are invited; we are called. We are God’s solution to a troubled world but we can only share that solution if we *do* go.

We cannot be armchair Christians if we really hear what God is saying to us.

“Look, the Lamb of God.” Let us follow him!