

I Wonder ... ?

(John 1:1-14 and Luke 2:1-20)

The little boy wanted to meet God. Now he knew it must be a long trip to where God lived, so he packed a lunch for his journey – a big bag of potato chips and some bottles of root beer. When he had gone about three blocks – a long distance for a little boy – he saw an old woman sitting on a park bench. Feeling a little tired and thirsty from his journey, the little boy sat down on the bench and took out a root beer. Just as he was about to take a sip he noticed that the old lady looked a little hungry, so he offered her some potato chips. She smiled at him as she gratefully accepted his offer.

Thinking she might also be thirsty he offered her one of his root beers. She silently smiled at him again and took the bottle. Her smile was infectious and the little boy delighted in having brightened the old woman's face. And so they sat on that bench all afternoon sharing a simple meal of potato chips and root beer – never speaking a word.

Soon the boy realized that it was getting late. He got up to leave; but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman, and gave her a big hug. And she gave him her biggest smile.

When the little boy arrived home, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could ask another question, he added, "And you know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Now at the same time, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate potato chips in the park with God." Before her son could say a word, she added, "And you know what, he's much younger than I expected." Please pray with me.

Gracious and loving God, may the words I speak be your words and your words alone this evening. Help us to know your presence in the world. May the word proclaimed resonate within our hearts, stimulate our minds, and inspire our response to meet you in the smallest child, in the oldest woman, in the Risen Christ. For the sake of the Christmas Story we pray. Amen.

In our *Disciple One* Bible study we are sometimes asked to place ourselves in the role of the characters that frame the stories of the Old Testament. We are asked to imagine or wonder what a particular character might have felt as his or her story unfolded. For example, if we were to place insert ourselves into the Christmas story, we might ask questions like: *I Wonder* how Mary felt being the mother of Jesus? *I Wonder* how Joseph felt knowing he was engaged to the mother of God? *I Wonder* how the

shepherds felt as they were visited by angels?

The ultimate in such a role playing exercise would be to wonder how God felt as he looked down on the earth from the vantage point of heaven. What a view God must have had as the birth of his son unfolded in that little town of Bethlehem. What would it have been like to look down from that heavenly vantage point as the Christmas Story unfolded through Mary and Joseph, the angels and the shepherds. What a view that must have been.

As I wondered about that heavenly vantage point, my mind took me a place I haven't visited for several years – Copper Mountain, Colorado. Skiing, has always been my passion because when I'm on the mountain – especially Copper Mountain – that's when I feel closest to God. For me, skiing is the closest thing to heaven on earth.

I recalled my experiences on the mountain. My favorite place at Copper is on the steep side the mountain where not a lot of people go. But that's not my reason for going there. There is a trail about a quarter of the way down from the top – at about 11,500 feet. Before descending into there is a spectacular view of the East Gore Range rising up in the distance. But it's the view of the valley below – not the mountains above – that is so awesome.

Looking down on the valley 3,500 vertical feet below the first thing you notice is the size of things – the buildings and condos, the people moving about, the cars and trucks on I-70 climbing up toward Vail Pass and points west. Everything is as if it were in miniature and moving in slow motion. The effect is euphoric – it's like a dream.

The smallness of the valley below makes me feel larger than life. It infuses me with a tingling feeling and *I Wonder ...* is this what God felt like – larger than life – as he looked down on the little village of Bethlehem?

As I prepare to make my way down through the trees and into the valley I am suddenly aware that I am alone on the mountain. “Ah ha,” this must be what it was like for God – the one who is so distant from us as to be alone on the mountain. As I prepare launch off a near-by cornice of crusty snow the loneliness of this heavenly scene is almost frightening. And *I Wonder ...* is this what God felt like – distant and alone, separated from us, perhaps even a little frightened – as he looked down on the little village of Bethlehem?

In what seems like only a handful of minutes I am standing at the base of the mountain, physically exhausted, out of breath. I am also emotionally spent as I look back up the mountain to the place I was before. Sadness overtakes me as *I Wonder ...* is this what God felt like when the story ended. *I wonder ...* will I ever have this experience again – to look down on the earth from God's vantage point of heaven – from atop Copper Mountain.

The Christmas Story told by Luke doesn't give us too much of a clue as to what God was feeling on that first Christmas. But *I Wonder* if God didn't feel a lot like I felt making that 3,500-foot descent into the valley. What happened on that first Christmas? What was it God was doing on that day?

God came down from heaven! That's what happened! God, the divine creator, came down the mountain to meet us in our valley. God descended into our smallish human world to

become like us and to be one *with us* – to be one *of us*. On that first Christmas Day God's view of the world changed. God gave up that heavenly view and came down at Christmas to meet us in Jesus.

And God's vantage point changed forever. No longer does God look down on us from a distance. No longer is God isolated from us. God is revealed to us in Jesus Christ – at first a baby, soon to be a boy, and then a man. God can now look us straight in the eye – standing on the same ground that we stand on.

In Christ Jesus God has leveled the playing field. In Christ Jesus God's presence in the world is made real and it all happened at Christmas when God came down. Our experience of God is no longer confined to the mountain tops. God has descended from heaven and meets us in our valleys as well as on our mountain tops. God meets us in the very ordinariness of our daily lives. This is the miracle of Christmas – the Incarnation – God with us in the person of Jesus.

I Wonder ... how God felt as the Christmas Story unfolded so many years ago? *I Wonder ...* how God feels today as we celebrate the story once again. The answer to these questions can be found in another story – the story of a little boy who wanted to meet God. And it can be found in the silent smile of that old woman on the park bench. God, you see, desires to meet us where we are. God desires to have a relationship with us – in our valleys today and not just in heaven later.

The answer can be found in the countless stories of the divine-human encounter – in your stories. The Christmas Story is about God breaking into our ordinary lives. All too often I

think we underestimate the power of simple things like a smile, a kind word, a bottle of root beer, or a hug – the smallest acts of caring. These are the ways we encounter God. Like the little boy who desired to meet God and ended up sharing a simple meal with a kindly old woman.

As we share a simple meal together this evening, as we bring the light of Christ into the world, feel God's presence in this place. Feel it now! As you go from this place consider the true meaning of Christmas – that God has descended from the mountain top to meet us in the most ordinary circumstances of our lives – like lunch with an old woman on a park bench. As you go from Christmas to begin the New Year, be like that little boy and plan on spending some time with God. Have lunch with God. Just make sure you have lots of root beer and potato chips.