

## “The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us”

John 1:1-14

Last night, at our Candlelight service, I spoke about tradition. Traditions, by definition, are meant to be good. A tradition is a good or useful thing that gets passed down or taught to be put into use from generation to generation, or year to year, or even day to day. No one would willingly keep up a tradition that they think is negative or bad.

This does not mean that all traditions are good in and of themselves. There are traditions from the past that we have done away with for obvious reasons. For many generations, men would settle their differences by dueling to the death with swords or pistols. Not a good tradition.

Celebrating Christmas, the Christ Mass, is a good tradition. The date set for the birth of our Lord is also from tradition. The first mention in the writings of the Church Fathers is from around the year 200. Sometime in the year 250-300 range, Christmas began to be celebrated within the Church. For the early Christians, every Sunday was a celebration of Easter – which we still believe today. That is why we have the “tradition” of gathering and celebrating together each Sunday. That is a good tradition.

So those who come on Saturday night must not be “real Christians?” No, St. Paul says, “let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath” [Col. 2:16].

It doesn't matter when we worship and celebrate Christ being born, Christ dying, Christ rising from the dead. What matters is that we celebrate Christ being born, Christ dying, Christ rising from the dead.

The Orthodox Christians will not celebrate Jesus' being born until January 6. Their tradition is to celebrate the birth of Jesus and the coming of the wise men on the same day – even though they know the wise men didn't come until a year or more later.

The Western Christians chose December 25. Why? You ask. It was determined that Good Friday was on March 25 the year Christ died. According to tradition, going back into Old Testament times, a prophet will always die on the day of his birth. The day of his birth is the day he is conceived.

If Jesus was conceived on March 25 (and according to the Church Year calendar, March 25 has been celebrated as the Annunciation – the day the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary – ever since the Church Year calendar began); if Jesus was conceived on March 25, according to tradition, nine months later (December 25) was the most logical date for Jesus being born.

Even though this does not fit with what Luke tells us about Jesus being born at the time when the shepherds were out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night (which they did during the time that the lambs were being born – in the spring of the year); even though this tradition of December 25 being the date, it is still a good tradition because it helps us to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

You can't have a Church Year calendar with Jesus being born and dying on the same day or during the same week. It helps us to tell the history of what God has done for you, so that makes it a good tradition.

In all that you do during this time, this season of Christmas, with all the traditions that you have with your family; take every opportunity to use those traditions to tell the history of what God has done for you. What matters on this day and throughout this season is that we celebrate Christ being born, Christ dying, Christ rising from the dead, and we receive that joy of the Gospel and hope of the resurrection in God's Word and Sacrament, which is so much more than just a tradition. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Amen.