

“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. We know that Christmas was celebrated in Rome on December 25th during the time of St. Telephorus (the seventh bishop of Rome who lived in the early 100's AD). He is credited with beginning the tradition of Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. So what we did last night (even though it wasn't at midnight) and what we are doing today has been

done for a long time. 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 Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

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 25th the year Christ died. According to tradition, going back into Old Testament times, a prophet will always die on the same day as his coming to life. The day of his coming to life is the day he is conceived.

If Jesus was conceived on March 25th (and according to the Church Year calendar, March 25th has been celebrated as the Annunciation – the day the angel

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

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 – you would think that would mean He was born in the spring of the year). However, I recently learned that the Awassi sheep, which are a long-haired sheep typical throughout the Middle East, have a lambing season from late November through early February with late December being right in the peak of it. This is especially true of the sheep in Israel and Syria. The Awassi sheep in Egypt and Turkey have a lambing season that is more late winter into the spring.

This date, December 25th, which has been selected to celebrate the incarnation (the taking on of flesh) of the Son of God was chosen because of the church's continued focus on the cross of Jesus and the reason that He had to come as the child of Mary, as the Seed of the woman (promised to Adam), as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. March 25th was chosen as the day Jesus was conceived because of the Hebrew tradition surrounding the death of a prophet.

And we know from Luke's Gospel that He was born at the time when the lambs were being born, which up until a couple of weeks ago I thought meant in the spring of the year. Therefore, the tradition of December 25th being the date may be more than just a good tradition.

What I truly love about the Church Year calendar with Christmas being tied to the death of Christ and His resurrection on Easter – these dates being nine months apart. It helps us to tell the history of what God has done for you and me. It helps us to tell the story of what really happened more clearly.

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 story, 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 nowhere else than in God's Word and Sacrament, which is so much more than just a tradition. "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."

He came as the child of Mary. He came as the Second Adam. He came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He comes to us in His flesh and blood, as He gives us a foretaste of the feast to come. And we say, Come Lord Jesus, as we wait for the feast which has no end. Amen.