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Christmas and the Sacred

Religion is about reconnecting to what we hold sacred. And what we hold sacred is what we hold to be ultimately meaningful, of transcendent significance; it is what orients and grounds us, what defines who we are and who we aspire to become. Our reverence for what we hold sacred is what gives our lives their meaning and purpose.

We Christians understand the sacred in personal terms. Our God is not a principle like Freedom or Justice but a person, some*one* with whom we can have an intimate relationship. The Christian sacred becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus and this evening, even in the person of a new born child, lying in a bed of straw, surrounded by doting parents and devout shepherds.

The Christian sacred does not dazzle and overwhelm, it does not cause our legs to shake and our knees to knock. To touch what Christians hold sacred we need not reach up high but rather stoop down low, low enough to take hold of the Christ child all bundled up, lying in a bed of straw surrounded by barnyard animals. And so too the spirit of Christmas is a spirit of stooping down, arms wide open, in a spirit of compassion and generosity to treasure the simple joys of home and hearth, of light and life on a dark winter's night. It's a spirit of giving and receiving, of holding and being held, of feeding and being fed. What we hold sacred is not a matter of wealth or weaponry but incarnate in a newborn child, innocent, vulnerable and helpless, calling out of us the best in us.

And what about God? What does God hold sacred? What gives meaning and purpose to *his* divine life? Today we learn the answer to that question too-- that what *God* holds sacred is *us*, for we are the object of his creation, the focus of his care, the love of his life. We are what is of supreme significance to him, to the point of his becoming Emmanuel, God with us.

What we hold sacred holds us sacred. Are we not then called, by all that is sacred, to live accordingly?-- to treat one another sacred, not to overlook but to revere, not to exploit but to cherish, not to take for granted but to behold in awe. We are called by all we hold sacred to hold ourselves sacred, family and friend, neighbor and stranger, each of us, ourselves included.

After all, it is not just God who becomes incarnate this evening. Humanity too is born in that bed of straw. As God becomes flesh, so flesh becomes divine, tonight, in the birth of the Christ child. The presents we give and receive tomorrow remind us and those dear to us, that we are all dear to one another, and dear to God. May we live in that same spirit, that spirit of reverence and awe both for God and for one another. May we all have a blessed day tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow. May we become ever more who we are already, in God's sight.