

This sermon for Christmas Day is about half my usual length as we played a video from the Rev Mitri Raheb for the second half.

The genius and the wonder of Christmas Day and the Christian faith is that this God who is never absent does need to be born into human flesh. The fundamental thing that Christmas day is proclaiming – that which will be the wonder or the stumbling block — the stupendous Christmas claim itself, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world/cosmos to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Authentic faith requires genuine astonishment. If you can no longer be astonished, if you have lost the quality of wonderment, if you are so cynical you cannot experience awe, not only Christmas, but faith, will be hard for you.

I heard it said recently, Any Christian who does not believe that Jesus was born in Bethlehem is a Christian without a pulse." I'm not exactly sure what the issue was there, was it about defending the historicity of Bethlehem being the birth place of Jesus, or the very existence of Jesus...But my attention soon passed over those meaty but historical issues to the evocative expression, "Christian without a pulse"... what does it mean? A dead Christian?, a Christian without a heart beat? Someone whose faith is intellectual, theoretical rather than earthy and sweaty and practical?

I like the thought that Christmas Day is the day of recovery of our pulses for today the eternal, yet ever new, and still being completed story of the birth of Jesus into human flesh can again stir within you and put the pulse into your life, faith, loving. Jesus' birth gives us a pulse, gets the blood flowing, the guts churning, the passion arousing.

The original Christmas story certainly put a pulse into those familiar characters. Sent their pulses racing. Every person within it was aroused and provoked or fearful or something. No-one that year at Christmas nodded or smiled in a condescending manner. Mary was perplexed when Gabriel told her she was to have a baby. Joseph was afraid of being humiliated. The shepherds were terrified when they were told that God was at work. King Herod was so frightened he would lose his power that he slaughtered the children of Bethlehem, and the wise men fled in fear of their lives. And repeatedly the angels appear and say to them individually 'Don't be afraid'. Do not fear for what God is doing is good news for you.

At the root of the word "Incarnation" stands the Latin *carno*, "flesh" or "meat"—think of the Spanish *chile con carne*, "spicy stew with meat." From this root we get the English words *carnal* "of the flesh," *carnivorous* "meat-eating," *carnage* "slaughter of flesh," and even *carnation*, "the color of flesh." Hence, the Incarnation speaks of the "carnal God," the God who is *enfleshed* in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; literally, if somewhat crassly, *God con carne*, "God with meat on."

Sometimes I think it is Christians who struggle most with the humanity of Jesus while those not in the church struggle most with the divinity of Jesus.

Thinks of Gaza and the holy land this Christmas

Some of what I hear or read feels like it will only intensify the conditions that lead to cycles of hate, fear, and violence.

That's why it's so important to point out positive examples that point a way beyond the current agony. Nobody can say the perfect words, the one magic thing that will fix everything ... but thank God for people who speak words that reject violence, not just by "them," but also by "us."

Dr Mitri Raheb video

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<https://youtu.be/vdzn6FeUvdw?si=4S9fR7QMBMyfu5eH>