Book 2

Sunday December 3, 1972

"OUR SEARCH IS ANSWERED!"

The story of all the world's religions is in one sense the story of persons trying to find God and to know God. It is the story of human beings trying to penetrate the deepest mysteries of the creation and to be in contact with the source of all creation. All religions in one way or another have this desire and purpose in common.

To put it another way, from the beginning of time, human beings have intuitively sought God. We have always had and still have a kind of built in appetite for God. This is what the Psalmist meant when he wrote -- "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?"

A well-know Advent hymn puts it this way, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." The word Emmanuel literally means God with us.

Now of course when I say that all people long for some kind of relationship with God, or that all people seek to know God, this does not mean that all people put that desire in those words. People clothe their religious search in different kinds of garments. Some say that they want somehow to be assured that the universe is friendly or that there is some purpose to life, some more ultimate meaning, some sense to living in this world.

Others might put this built in appetite for God in terms of a search for truth. But the fact is that all people do attempt in one way or another to make some sense out of life. All of us seek to find some meaning in life. But all people do not always use the usual religious language or the word God to describe this desire or search.

Again, what we are saying here is that all religions and all people search in one way or another for God. Thus it is that in a thousand ways throughout history and even now, people have pleaded, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel!"

Well, Advent and Christmas which follows, say that this longing has been satisfied. Our scripture lesson for this morning put it in poetic language, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people." In the Gospel of John the words are different, but the meaning is the same--"And the word become flesh and dwelt among us."

These are all ways of saying that God is here! God is with us! Advent and Christmas say that we find God right in the middle of life; in the midst of his people, loving them healing them and even dying for them.

Advent and Christmas say that our search has been answered. And it has been answered in a surprising and unexpected way. God arranged for the birth of Jesus to take place in a smelly cold cow barn, as unlikely and surprising a place as you could find. And the child as he grew up spent his days in many of the same ways as we spend our days. He got into trouble too. The authorities said he wasn't religious enough in the right kind of ways and they tried to get rid of him.

God often enters our world and our own lives, even now, unobtrusively and in unexpected ways.

And our search is answered in other ways as well. In the coming of Jesus, in his birth, life, death and resurrection, we know that to be a human being is more than just what we see around us.

The coming of Jesus tells us that there is another and quite extraordinary part of us which is never altogether at home with just the everyday necessities of being human, paying bills, going to work, and carrying on the other routines of living.

Our lives are shadowed by eternal longings and hungers. There is a kind of mystery to all of life that continually haunts us. We know that we are forever under the judgment of impossible standards, forever reaching beyond what is safe and normal and expected, as though in answer to a far call that we can ignore only at our peril.

Dimly we realize that our village called civilization is still fed from hidden places. We know that we do not know all there is to know. What is beyond the range of our space capsules? What is beyond the limit of space?

Our search is answered and yet it leads us to more mystery. This is why we worship. It is an acknowledgement of the mystery and at the same time a celebration of the fact that God is with us and among us and comes still in unexpected ways.

We are like a wild duck that dropped into a farmyard for a meal of corn and stayed on for the next, and then the next, until he became a tame duck. But each autumn when his fellow-ducks passed overhead in their migratory flight and called to him, there was a restlessness deep inside him and he remembered who he was and what he was made for. He stirred and stretched his wings, but he never left the ground.

Celebrating Advent and Christmas is something like that. It is our fresh remembering of who we are; that there is far more to us than meets the eye and that our dignity as human beings lies in recognizing within us an irrespressible yearning for far, eternal things. It is our recognition and remembering of the mystery that is greater than life, and yet at the same time knowing that our search is being answered. God is with us.

The celebration of Communion also carries this message. It speaks of God in the common ordinary events of life, in eating and drinking, and yet there is mystery. Our search is answered--God is with us, and yet God is beyond us, drawing us forward.