Sunday, December 1, 1996
WHERE THE HUMAN AND THE DIVINE INTERSECT
Luke 1:76-79, 4:16-21

We have never seen his face. We have never heard his voice. We do not know what he looked like, although countless pictures of him have been drawn and painted from imagination. At his birth, his parents named him "Jesus," a common name found everywhere. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, author of Jewish Antiquities, so many men had this name that it lacked individuality in that day.

As far as we know, during his brief span of life, Jesus had nothing in his name or appearance to distinguish him. He was ordinary, appearing in no way different from many Jewish young men in his time.

Yet he was not ordinary. One of my favorite brief descriptions of him that most of you have read or heard before is this one. The author is unknown:

"He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village, not rich in heroic names. He had neither formal learning nor material wealth. He worked in a carpenter's shop until he was 30, and then for about three years, he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book; he never held an office; he never owned a home; he never had a family; he never went to college; he never put his foot inside a big city; he never traveled more than 200 miles from where he was born. He led no army. He wrote no music. The historians of his time thought he was unworthy of mention. He never did one of those things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but God in heaven and himself."

"While he was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. His closest followers denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth: his coat. When he was dead, he was put in a borrowed tomb through the pity of a friend. To some, he was a fanatic; to others, a dreamer of dreams."

"Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. Is it any wonder that our calendar of years begins with his birth, that we identify world events as being before Christ or after Christ?"

"I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of this earth as that one solitary life."

Wherein lies the uniqueness of this person named Jesus? During the next several Sundays, during this Advent Season leading up to Christmas Eve, we are going to look once again at him from several different perspectives. We want to see what his life and teachings mean to all of us and how he is different.

In the New Testament of the Bible, more than 40 different titles and metaphors are used to describe Jesus. Here are a few of them: Son of David, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Servant of God, Teacher, the Good Shepherd, the Divine Physician, Savior, Prophet, King,

Lord, the Stone, the Bridegroom, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Door, the Vine, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Lamb of God, the Bright Morning Star.

In this first sermon of the series, we are going to examine one very important aspect of Jesus, and that is his spirituality. More than anyone, Jesus lived on that mysterious boundary where the human and the divine intersect. His birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection together have brought God and humankind closer. He lived the human-divine intersection. He was the human-divine intersection.

Jesus was a person who was vividly in touch with the world of the Spirit. Whatever else he was, he was a “holy man.” When applied to Jesus, the word “holy” is not only an adjective pointing to righteousness and purity but even more so, it is a noun, pointing to the awesome reality and power at the center of his existence. A holy man or woman is a person who experiences the holy, vividly and frequently — one who is experientially in contact with the power of another realm that is at the same time present in this realm, the power of the Spirit — one who knows God intimately.

There have always been individuals who are more sensitive to the power of the Spirit in this world than most of us. As such, they are mediators between the realm of the Spirit and ordinary everyday life in this world. Such individuals are the connectors of the world of the Spirit and our everyday life. We see in them the power of God in a fresh and dynamic way. They are mystics and healers. They know, live, experience, and teach the interrelationship, the connectedness of the life of the Spirit and life in this world.

For the holy person, such as Jesus, there is no separation between the life of the Spirit and everyday life. There is no separation between the spiritual and the material. The spiritual is in the material, and the material is in the spiritual — all is one.

Somewhere along the way — and we don’t know precisely when — Jesus became aware of his spirituality, his unique spiritual gifts. He became conscious of a unique relationship with God and became the channel for the expression of powers no one had ever before dreamed of.

I can imagine the young boy Jesus spending many hours in the hills of Galilee while he pondered the wonders of the heavens, the sun and drifting clouds by day, the moon and stars by night. I can visualize him asking the question posed by the Psalmist a thousand years before: “What is humankind?”

And then one day, it happened. Into the consciousness of this thoughtful young man came an idea so remarkable that he probably didn’t realize its full implications at first. It was the consciousness of his unity with God.

According to the gospel accounts in the New Testament, Jesus’ ministry began with an experience of the “heavens opening” and the Spirit descending upon him. Later, he applied to himself the words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” and he spoke of the Spirit being active through him. He practiced spiritual disciplines common to holy women and men: fasting, solitude, regular times of prayer. Whatever else he was, Jesus was a holy man.

Now the question for us is, what does this have to do with us in today’s world?

The Spirit was upon Jesus for our sake — for the sake of everyone in the world, then, now, and in the future. As Jesus said of himself, according to Luke's gospel, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

To paraphrase, Jesus knew that one important part of his ministry was to heighten our awareness of God and to bring about a relationship of trust between each one of us and God, and at the same time, improve our relationships with each other. In the Gospel of John, Jesus put it this way: "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

Jesus knew that each one of us is already related to God. Each one of us has the Spirit of God within us. We are sons and daughters of God, not because of anything we have done, but because of what God has done in creating us. Therefore, an important part of the ministry of Jesus and of the church following his resurrection is to help people become aware of what already is — rather than having to create a relationship from scratch.

The ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the Christian church is to open blind eyes and unstop deaf ears — that is, to make people aware at deeper and deeper levels of who they really are, who their source in creation is, and to get a more vital and personal interaction moving between the Spirit of God and each one of us.

Jesus' goal was to help everyone — you and me — to understand the enormous potential within each one of us and to help us make the breakthrough for ourselves. Thus he said, according to the Gospel of John, "Those who believe in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will they do."

When Jesus said, "Follow me," he is asking us, among other things, to let him lead us to a new and deeper level of spiritual consciousness. He came into the world at a time when the wall of separation between human beings and God was high and wide. Humankind was living in the darkness of spiritual ignorance.

We human beings have always had an intuitive feeling about a higher power, a greater life. To use Dr. Herbert Benson's term, we are "wired for God." This wiring has lit the fires on every altar through the ages, built every temple, made every creed articulate, and supported every prayer. But there was always a great void separating human beings and God.

Then came Jesus. To use another metaphor, Jesus was the door in the wall separating us from God. In one place in the gospels, Jesus said, "I am the door; those who enter by me will be saved." This door makes it possible for us to enter the vast and beautiful spiritual dimension of life. In Jesus, the human and the divine intersect. And because of Jesus, the human and the divine intersect in us as well.

The good news is that you can become more and more aware of that intersection.

And there's even more good news. Once you begin to be aware of the God-reality in your life, it becomes clearer that being born into this world was something infinitely good. You become more aware of God's creation as being good. Over and over again in the book of Genesis in the Old Testament, we hear the refrain, "And God looked upon what God had made, and behold, it was very, very good."

But we have the tendency to forget about God's goodness and about God's Spirit as being a part of us. So it is that Jesus reminds us of that human-divine intersection within each one of us and within creation as a whole. In this sense, Jesus came to redeem us and the world. The word "redeem" literally means to "buy back," and that's what God does in Jesus.

In this season of Advent and Christmas, we talk a lot about letting Christ be born in us, which is another way of saying that we allow ourselves to recognize the Christ that is already in us.

Remember the message of Advent: through the gift of Jesus, you are being redeemed, but you have a crucial role to play in whether or not the grand design of God finally comes true in your life. God wants to make you full-grown and complete, but God will not do so without your consent and collaboration.

You and God are made for each other. Jesus came that you might have life and have it more abundantly. The human and divine intersect in you, just as they did in Jesus. Amen.