

CHRIST AMONG US

We just put the year 2009 to rest and what a year it was! The year was dominated by economic news, and most of it was bad. The stock market sank and the federal government spent billions on bailout plans. Everyone was talking about Health Care reform and Swine flu caused a world wide scare. Barak Obama was sworn in as the first African American president and Sonia Sotomayor was chosen as the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice. Octuplets were born and Michael Jackson died. The Pittsburg Steelers won the Super Bowl, the New York Yankees won the World Series and Tiger Woods decided to get his life in order. Closer to home, K-State got a new president and the Lutheran church plunged into controversy. This, of course, is just some of what happened in 2009.

You have your own memories of the year, and I hope they are more good than bad. Perhaps for you there was a wedding in 2009, or a graduation, or a new job, or the birth of a child. Or maybe 2009 was the year of a serious illness, or maybe a death in the family. The days of 2009 have come and gone.

I want you to think about this past year as you hear again the words of today's reading from the Gospel of John. Speaking about Christ, the reading says, "*He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.*"

He was in the world! Christ was present in 2009, just as he promised. He was present in the highlights of 2009 and he was present in the tragedies and heartaches of 2009. He was present on the bad days as well as on the good days. He was present during those times you treasure as well as during those times you would like to forget.

The very one who created the world was in the world. He was here, in the world, not just as a memory from the past, but actually present. He was here among us, in word and water, in bread and wine. He was with you. He was with me. He was present among people all around the world. Christ was in the world.

Yet, this reading reminds us that the world did not know him. How many people plodded through the year not knowing Christ was present? How many people failed to call upon him for help? How many people made needless mistakes because they did not follow his counsel? How many people got down on themselves because they did not hear his words of affirmation? How many people did not know his love and support? It is true, as today's reading says, "*He was in the world ... yet the world did not know him.*"

But even worse, this Word of God says that "*he came to what was his own and his own people did not accept him.*" He came to his own, to people like you and me. People who have heard his story - the stories of his birth, his ministry, his death, his resurrection, people who have been baptized, people who have gone to church. But not all accepted him. Some turned away. Some got distracted. Some got busy. Some stopped believing the promises. The result - some of Christ's own people did not accept Christ and his way of life.

It is now 2010. What about this year? What will happen this year? This we know for certain: Christ will be in the world! Christ will be present, just as he promised!

The question is, will we recognize the presence of Christ this year? Will we know him? Will we follow

him? Will we listen to him? Will we call upon him? Will we receive his love and support? Or, when this year is over, will it be said of us that Christ came to his own and his own did not accept him?

You know, it amazes me how people get so excited about Christmas, their hopes rise, they long for something better, and then once Christmas is over they can't wait to get their lives back to normal. God gives us Christmas to get us out of those old ruts. On Christmas Eve we prayed that we would be set free from the old slavery of our sin. Jesus came to give us a better life. So don't be in a hurry to get back to normal. Strive for something better. Set your sights high in 2010. Recognize the presence of Christ. Accept Christ and his way of life. Not just on Sundays, not just now and then, but 24-7.

And when you do, there is a promise for you. The Gospel reading for today proclaims that "*to all who received Christ, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.*" What a promise! Just think, you get to be a child of God! You get to know God. You get to be connected to God. Through Jesus Christ that you can know the incredible truth of God. Through Jesus Christ you can experience the amazing grace and love and forgiveness of God.

The year 2009 has come and gone. We now stand at the beginning of a new year. This year comes with all kinds of possibilities. And it also comes with the promise of God! And the promise of God is this, that Christ will again live among us full of grace and truth!

So open your hearts and minds! Christ is present! Welcome him. Receive him. Accept him. And live each day as you were meant to live - as a child of God who is dearly, dearly loved!