

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 2, 2015

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When Jesus spoke to the Jews in the way recorded in the great 6th Chapter of Saint John's Gospel, He was up against an axiom of Jewish theology. *God could not take human form.* Many people today who are otherwise interested in Christian spirituality and the morality that derives from it, find the concept of Christ's Incarnation (God made man) illogical and superstitious. Their case can be argued with some eloquence. But all the objections are worthless because as it so happened, *God really did take human form* in Jesus of Nazareth. In St John's gospel we do not see Jesus arguing with the Jews on the *merits* of such an event. What we see is the Word made Flesh proclaiming Himself in such a way that fixed notions of what can or cannot happen have to be changed. So much for all the eloquent reasoning!

In speaking to the Jews, Our Lord said the bread of God is that which cometh down out of Heaven. The Jews were on board with that. The bread of God comes down continually, in creation, in the word of prophecy, and in all the activity of God. But then comes the show stopper! Jesus says, "I Myself am the Bread of Life; I am come down from Heaven." In this He is proclaiming that in all of history this life-giving and nourishing activity of God was Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, which became focused and visible physically and materially at the Incarnation. The Bread of Life took flesh upon Himself and became man. In a way, such language in St John Chapter 6 parallels what was said earlier in the opening *Prologue* of John's Gospel. The light which lighteneth every man at the Incarnation was seen to be God's Own Son, coming into the world.

Those people in our own day who object to the particular claims of the Christian gospel might claim to value Jesus as a prophet and wise teacher, along with other such guiding lights in history, who bring us close to God. But that is not the Church's proclamation.

In the California gold rush days, when people went looking for gold they often found it from reading the clues in soil samples. When they found traces of certain other minerals they knew there was potential for gold in the vicinity. We can think of the great men of history, the Old Testament prophets, the saints of the Church,

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and the wise men of other religions, as similar to these traces of minerals. When they spoke, God was nearby.

But the other way to find gold *is to find gold!* You might see it lying in a streambed. In which case, it isn't thrown away as a clue leading you to something else. *Gold is gold!* It is of one substance with what the prospector was seeking. He doesn't look at it and say gold must be around here somewhere. He says *eureka!* *This is it!*

Christians say, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." *This is it.* We proclaim Christ as Son of God. He is this kind of gold, not derivative or taken as a mere symbol, or indicating that God is in the vicinity. Rather, Jesus is God Himself. At a particular time in history *Bethlehem was a eureka experience!*

Christians are people learning to see God. We do this not by being at the mercy of second-hand sources, or through the medium of our own sinful and therefore distorted image. We learn to see God in Christ, Who is the "express image" of the Father (*Hebrews 1.3*) and Mediator of the Father's gift of life. Christ is the Bread, the Living Bread Who in a unique manner comes down from Heaven. To eat of this Bread, to receive the Living Lord into our souls, so that He becomes our life, is to live forever. Not until we reach Heaven will we fully know all that the Sacrament of His Body and Blood has been doing for us and in us in all the time of our life.