

FRIENDS OF AUGUSTINE

AUGUSTINE FOR TODAY



BORN IN US

THOUGHTS FOR CHRISTMAS

WORD MADE FLESH

The Word, God before all times,
the Word, flesh at the appropriate time;
the maker and placer of the sun, made and placed under the sun;
marshalling all the ages from the bosom of the Father,

consecrating this day from the womb of his mother;
filling the world, lying in the manger;
so great in the form of God, so small in the form of a servant,
in such a way that neither the greatness is diminished by the smallness,
nor the smallness overwhelmed by the greatness. Sermon 187.1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being with him was life, and the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-5

SMALL IS BIG

He made himself small
but He didn't lose himself. Sermon 196.3

The Lord God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, through whom he also created the worlds. Hebrews 1:1-4

GOD IN US

He could find no room in the inn,
but makes a temple for himself in the hearts of believers.
It was in order that weakness might become strong,
that strength became weak. Sermon 190.4

Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. Philippians 2:6-11

REFLECTION

Augustine spent his early years searching for truth and happiness. Then it dawned on him that he was looking in the wrong place. 'Why do we rush about from the top of heaven to the bottom of earth looking for God?' he asks. 'He is at home with us here, if only we could be with Him.' So the incarnation has a central place in Augustinian spirituality, because it represents God's promise that, from now on, God is not a lonely, monarchical presence living somewhere 'out there'. Yes, God is big and powerful, but God is also small and weak. The fact is that God needs us. God *is* only because God is *in relationship*.

So Jesus was conceived outside marriage, and born in a stable to a poor woman from an unfashionable part of Palestine. Whatever the literal truth of this story may be, its meaning for Christians is clear. Human lives (particularly the lives of poor and marginalised people) are themselves the temples of the living God, and all human beings have that God-image within them. For us, the problem lies in clearing away the clutter that muffles the voice of the God-within. This clutter can take any number of forms. It can come from too many commitments, an overactive mind, overemphasis on possessions, destructive relationships, low self esteem, stress, anxiety and so on. With so much going on inside us, it is sometimes very difficult to believe God is there at all. In that case, we are wrong. 'You are the most hidden from us and yet the most present among us,' says Augustine to his God.

But it is not just in individuals that God is present. Augustine makes this clear in *The City of God*. God brings change into the world through the way people live their lives. Social and political institutions, as much as the Church itself, have the potential to become the household of God. As God's people, we are charged with the responsibility for making that happen.

This means that the season of Advent is an extraordinarily important one for Christians. In effect, the journey of Advent is the journey towards the God within. At the social and political level, the big message of Advent is the call to create more just institutions, to side with the poor, to bring the excluded into community. At the personal level, the call is to clear away the clutter that keeps us apart from the living God, who is present in all our hearts. 'If only our minds could be held steady,' says Augustine, 'they would be still for a while; and for that short moment we would glimpse the splendour of eternity which is forever still.'

POINTS TO PONDER

- What are the things that are closing my ears to voice of the God who is in my heart?
- Which bits of noise and clutter can I clear away during this Christmas season?
- Is there one thing I could do now to promote a more just and peaceful world?
- How can I give God a chance by creating times of stillness in my life?
- How can I find space to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas?

When God made you..

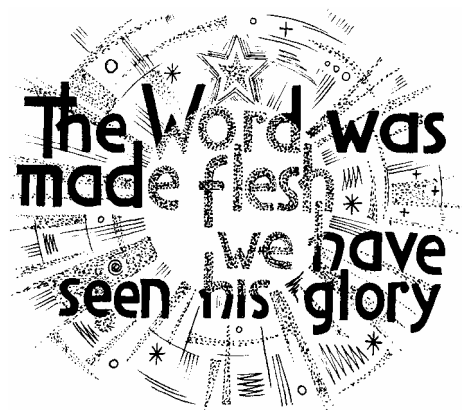
When
God
made
you
there
was
silence
in
heaven
for
five
minutes.

Then
God
said:
'How come I never thought of that before?'

From 'Perhaps God' by Ralph Wright OSB

Praying with Romans 8:22

God our midwife:
Our wombs convulse,
Our flesh cries out
'Come soon'.



God with us and in us:
Contain in your hands
The breaking of waters
The blood and the din of the birth:
Then through our tears and joy, deliverer,
Your naked, infant kingdom may be born.

Gillian Paterson

‘Enter then into your heart and if you have faith you
will find Christ there.’

Compiled by Gillian Paterson and Paul Graham OSA