

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

INCARNATION

With the possible exception of *resurrection*, it must be the greatest word of power in the Christian language. As a person whose whole training has been in the awareness of words, I find this one has an increasing power to make my mind reel. There are a few concepts that are universal to humanity: one of them is *flesh*. German *fleisch*, Italian *carne*: it means meat, and it also means the human body, the greatest symbol we have of what we are. This beloved form has unique power over us, with the presiding head, the penetrating eyes, the sensitive ears and nose, the questioning and receiving hands, the arms to accept and embrace, the shoulders which speak of endurance and effort, the beating heart, and all its tides and flows of blood and water: we are aware of the standing form in confrontation or the movement of work or travel, the playing form in dance and encounter, the body at rest in others, or in sleep. Nothing could approach the power over our feelings of the human form itself.

You must name him Jesus

This is what God becomes in the Incarnation. It is as if he wishes to give to the form of humanity a specific face and name, to be, as Paul says, the new Adam - the one we think of when someone says *human*. There is the power of the Incarnation. To love a human being is one thing; to love God, something different. In Jesus they become the same. What a transformation of human love! So often our longing to love and be loved leads us into difficulty and quandary. We are very imperfect, and our desire to be good for each other is so often frustrated. Christmas is a time when this fact is brought home to us: we hope each year that we shall be able to find simple happiness, that our hard lives will be shown up for what they are, a kind of false imposition on our true selves. I am not really this harassed, distracted individual who staggers through his life like a zombie, catching the disasters just before they happen, overworking, disappointing and disappointed; our family is not *really* this terrible mess of lost opportunities and poor responses; our community is not really this shabby parody of what it ought to be; watch

us at Christmas, we say, and then we'll appear in our true colours. Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!

Down to such a world as this

The fact is, that our image of the body is actually very like our image of ourselves. The *image* is like Superman (I sometimes see nothing on the telly except Superpeople); but the *reality* is pale and spotty and weedy. We are not bursting with health and creativity, but coughing badly and short of a good idea. We deeply love humanity: it is Tom, Dick, and Harry with whom we have problems. So the God who takes our flesh does not come in the majesty of the clouds, but humbly, moving us to the depths with his littleness, his insignificance; nothing short of the Cross can be his destiny. He does not come to accept the homage of the perfect, but the simple sharing of an ordinary family. We know - if we're honest - the meaning of that word "ordinary". His communion with us is absolute, he shows us how close he wants to draw to us.

The Joy of Christmas

is something tremendously intimate to each of us. We have to open this gift ourselves, in the depths of our distance from divinity. It is there that our eyes must meet those of the humble God who reaches out to us with such almighty compassion. *Open the gates, for God is with us, alleluia.*

Fr Philip