

Second Reformed Church, Pella IA  
Sun., Dec. 25, 2011  
Sophie Mathonnet-VanderWell  
John 1: 1-20  
God's Love Letter to Us

A long time ago, somewhere in the rolling hills of New York state, lived two young lovers. Theirs was a sweet friendship but a tragic courtship. They lived about 100 miles apart and so could not see each other very often. The only lifeline for their love was the mail. Back then there were no telephones. No cars to make a quick trip in the evening or on weekends. Weekly, they received a letter in the mail, and weekly, they would write a long letter back. After several years of correspondence and making occasional trips by horse and buggy, the young man felt that it was time to ask the momentous question. And so, carefully and with all the thought in the world, he crafted the most beautiful love letter that he could. Included in the lines was his marriage proposal. If your answer is yes, he said, write back immediately. If I receive no answer, I will believe that you do not want to be my wife and I will bother you no longer.

All this could have turned into a beautiful love story with a happy ending; wedding bells, a warm home, children running through hallways, growing old together. But by some mishap, when the mail carrier was sorting the mail that morning in the Post Office, the letter fell behind a bureau unseen and was lost. It was never delivered. It was never opened. It was never answered. The young man never heard back from his sweet heart and came to believe that she had spurned his marriage proposal. The young woman never received the letter and was too proud to inquire why her boyfriend had stopped writing. Though thoughts and doubts lingered in their minds, fear and pride paralyzed them both.

Over time, they stopped looking expectantly in the mail every day for a letter to arrive. And so for thirty years they lived lonely lives in their own homes. For thirty years they remembered and wondered and waited hopelessly, but nothing happened.

Until one day, the officials at the Post Office were refurbishing the building. When they pulled out the old bureau from the wall in order to paint it, they found the old love letter, yellowed with time, dusty, but still intact. With all their apologies, they delivered the letter to the address and to their amazement found that the same woman still lived there. You can imagine her mixed emotions when she opened the letter. The joy at finding that her sweet love had not really forgotten her after all, and her bitterness at all of those lost and wasted years. And so after being separated by thirty years of sorrow, pride, and uncertainty, the two lovers were finally reunited. A love-letter lost had wasted and emptied two lives. But a love-letter found had redeemed the sorrow. A love-letter found had made possible a new beginning.

In the gospel according to John there is no Christmas story, as we know it with Mary, Joseph, shepherds and the baby Jesus. Instead, the story of Jesus begins, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The Word was made flesh. The Word is Jesus Christ. Interesting, isn't it,

that Jesus Christ is called the Word of God? What is a word but a message, something we use to communicate, to express a thought or a feeling? It is as if the person of Jesus is literally a message—God's message. God's word of love became a human being and came to live among us. God's love letter became a baby, born into this world to embody God's presence and live like us. Jesus is God's Word become flesh. That baby born two thousand years ago in Bethlehem, in a dark and musty stable, the one we sing of and sing to this morning, Jesus, is God's love letter to the world.

*If you have never received a love letter in your life, or at least have not received one lately, tell yourself today that you have.* In the person of Jesus, God sent you a divine loveletter; a divine message. And the divine message is a declaration of God's love, a "proposal" that God and the world, that God and you, should no longer be far apart or ignorant of one another, but that you should find each other and be reconciled, reunited, like two long lost friends.

A love-letter has to be received and acknowledged before the circle is complete though. A love letter has to be read, not just once, but over and over and over again. Cherished. Kept in a treasure box. The box opened every so often, just to make sure that it is real. Memorized, repeated, reveled in. Isn't it often like that with loveletters? If a love letter is lost, unread, lovers move apart; the love dies.

Sometimes God's love letter, Jesus, gets lost somewhere behind a bureau in our minds. Perhaps a bad experience in church many years ago keeps us ever from taking that letter seriously anymore. Or we never read the letter carefully in the first place. Or we stopped reading somewhere along the line, thinking that once or twice was quite enough. Or maybe it was never clear to us that the letter was addressed to us, personally and directly. Somehow, for whatever reason, the message of God's love, God's word become flesh has lost its luster and power.

But with God, it is never too late. God's patience is eternal. The young lovers waited thirty years, and God can wait an eternity if need be, for you to open and read that letter of love; for you to turn to Jesus Christ with a heart that longs to know him.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among. Jesus is God's message, God's love letter to you. Have you ever sent Christmas cards or letters to friends and received no reply? Have you ever written to people from the distant past, those you haven't heard from in a long, long time? You wonder, what happened to those people? Have they forgotten me, don't they care? Was the card lost in the mail?

Don't let God's love letter to you go unanswered. The divine love letter, Jesus himself, has already been sent. Have you written back?