

I Christmas, Year B
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The Reverend Rob P. Travis

“Light In The Darkness”

When I was in my second year of college I had a roommate named Ross, We had been friends during our first year, his dad was a pastor as well, And we had other things in common, so we decided to be roommates, and we went into the housing lottery together, hoping to get a nice place to live. But we had a terrible pick in the lottery. Out of some 3,000 rooms, we selected number 2,978.

Consequently we lived near the bottom of the air shaft of McBain hall, in a room that had no natural light. Well it did get 19 minutes of sunlight each day, around 11 AM when the sun reflected off of the 8th floor window in the shaft, and through the window into our tiny hole. The only thing worse than the darkness of our room was the smell. Students on the upper floors seemed to like to throw their garbage into the shaft, and no one seemed to understand or care, that the garbage was only cleaned out of the shaft once a semester.

As you can tell, it was a humiliating experience living in that room, but Ross and I tried to make the best of it. One thing we shared in common was his computer, I didn't have one and he was willing to let me use his when I wanted to. Ross' computer had that nifty feature that many of us have probably forgotten by now, what with all the fantastic screen savers out there today, you could put your own words into a banner which would scroll across your screen whenever the screen saver came on.

One day shortly after Christmas, Ross and I were sitting in our dark and stinky room, thinking of what to put in the screen saver. Now I look back in longing to have the time to think about such trivial things.

We found out that both of us loved the prologue to the Gospel of John. So we thought it would be cool to have “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” scrolling across the screen. The only thing that would be cooler than that would be to have it scrolling across the screen in Greek, since that was the original language of the gospel of John.

So, you guessed it, we were geeks, nerds if you will, and we had to have the screen saver scroll the beginning of our favorite bible passage in Greek. It was something of a novelty to us, but we had no idea then how much of a novelty those very words from St. John were. As I discovered later, they describe the greatest, most important novelty of all time.

Novelty, of course, means new, And this gospel begins with news.

I hope the first thing you think of when you hear the words, “In the beginning,” is God, because that is what follows those three words at the beginning of Genesis. The beginning of the other gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke, showed the importance of Jesus’ humanity, by tracing his lineage on Earth, through his Earthly parents.

John goes back to the beginning of everything, and shows how Jesus already was God, before anything on earth existed. To talk about the incarnation of the Christ, John tells us about the pre-incarnate Word, which became Jesus in the flesh.

Jesus was the creative Word, which was in the beginning, when God spoke the universe into being. So this novelty, this non-trivial novelty, this new thing, of knowing Jesus as the Word of God, was actually older than the world itself.

And isn’t that a paradox as God so often seems to us? As I mentioned on Christmas Eve, God often reveals God’s self in paradox. This particular paradox that is consistently in scripture is that when God reveals to us a new thing, it is characterized in part by its ancientness.

God does not reveal things that never were, for when God reveals something true, that truth is part of God’s self, and God’s self existed before anything that exists. Jesus, is God Himself, and when he was revealed to the world through his incarnation, it was new, but it was a revelation as of a new thing that truly existed from the beginning. Jesus was a revelation of the living God. The life that the Word was from the beginning, which came into the world in Jesus, was the light, which enlightens everyone.

Some faiths, like Buddhism, regard enlightenment as something you must earn, but ours is not earned; it is freely given by Jesus, the light of the world.

I know a little something about living in darkness. The hole in which I lived in my sophomore year in college was dark. But when that bit of sunlight shone into the room each morning, even barely reflected off an upper window it was the most glorious thing. I would regularly position my chair in front of the window, just so that I could sit there and bask in that light for the few minutes that sunlight broke through the darkness of our room.

Somehow, when I was sitting in that chair, in the dark, with that light shining on me, the whole place seemed full of light, and all the unpleasantness evaporated.

The light that is Jesus shines in the darkness all the time, not just twenty minutes a day, not just when we are in church, not just when we are in prayer, that light is constantly shining in this dark world of ours.

When the darkness, tried with all its might to envelope that light...

when that darkness tried to snuff the light which Jesus brought into the world when He

became one of us, the light shone brighter than ever before.

When the darkness strove to have Jesus killed, as it had killed the prophets before Jesus, Jesus shone through that darkness, by defeating death itself, so even 2000 years later, Jesus lives on. He lives in you, and me, and in the hearts of all who believe in Him. Just ask my daughter Eva Jane, she will tell you that Jesus lives in her heart.

Living in us, Jesus shines his light into our otherwise dark lives. But that light does not stay there. By living as Christians in the world, we share the light of Christ, so it can brighten the whole world. And that light is so much brighter than the light of the Sun, because it must shine in a darkness so much darker than the environmental darkness of this world at night.

Because Jesus was the Word that existed with God the Father before anything was made. When He came into our hearts, He gave us power to become children of God ourselves. That power is not in us without Jesus. For without Jesus, we are but a shadow of a likeness of God, created to be like Him who was and is and is to come, but on our own we have all fallen away from His glory.

In that state, doing what God told us is the Law is the closest we can come to being pleasing to him, and in order to even attempt honestly following the law, we must be imprisoned by it as Paul writes in Galatians.

But by recognizing Jesus in our hearts we are set free from that imprisonment and receive a new birth, from God himself, in this new birth, we become sons and daughters of the king of the universe.

When He died and rose again Jesus became incarnate in us in a new way. The king of all creation is in residence in our hearts, making us no longer slave of all the forces in the world, but sons and daughters of the king, heirs of his very magnificent kingdom.

William Porcher Dubose, a great American theologian wrote:

“God in Christ is only half of the miracle of the incarnation, Christ in us is the full other half.”

Perhaps you came here today, fully accepting in your mind, the miracle of the incarnation of God in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, but have you fully accepted His incarnation in your own heart? When Jesus becomes incarnate again today in our celebration of the Eucharist, as you take Him into your body, invite Him to reveal His glory to you.

As this Christmas season draws to a close next week, be open to the incarnation of Christ in your life, and perhaps this new year will be full of novelty for you, the kind of novelty that only God can give, the ancient kind.