

Christmas Day - Year C
December 25, 2009
The Reverend Robert P. Travis

“The Presence of Jesus: Making Christ Known to the World”

Isaiah 52:7-10, Psalm 98, Hebrews 1:1-12, John 1:1-14

In 1960 a novice in a German Monastery wrote this back to his parents. “You perhaps cannot comprehend how we celebrate Christmas over here; on the first Christmas day we stay in cell all day, except for the Office in church, occupied with nothing but contemplating what had happened in the stable near Bethlehem. No Christmas carols, no crib, no Christmas tree (not even a little branch of it), no presents, no candles-- nothing, quite nothing save what happened at Bethlehem. And yet I can assure you quite honestly that I never experienced such a merry Christmas . . . over here the joy is more deep.”

Away from all the trappings of Christmas tradition the monks rejoice in the birth of one child, thousands of years after that birth.

Our Gospel this Christmas morning is sort of like that, rather than setting a glorious scene for us, of Angels singing to shepherds in a field, we are presented with the most basic explanation of what was behind what happened.

And yet the introduction to the Gospel of John, becomes greater, and more glorious when you think about what it all means, than even the miracle of the virgin birth in Bethlehem.

That is because, while the infancy narratives (that we heard last night) focus on the earthly origins of Jesus, John is concerned with the Cosmic dimension of the pre-existent Word outside of human time and place.

The cosmic dimension of the pre-existent Word, sounds out of this world, because it is, and this is what I want to try to convey for you this Christmas Day, that what happened in Bethlehem, was bigger than the world itself, it has implications for the entire universe, because what happened on a very human level included the foundation of the whole creation.

This morning, while this Gospel includes so much, there is one sentence that stands out to me, “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.”

This morning we celebrate that Jesus the Word that Created everything, was actually in the world. This is the very world that came into being through Him, that was made by His own being, the Creative Word of God, and He came into the very midst of it, became a part of it, as He was not before.

Our reading from Hebrews puts it, He who came as the human being Jesus “He also created the worlds.” Notice the plural of worlds. This is bigger than just us, and yet, because we are bound to this world, we often don't think of the fact, that the whole universe was created by the same person (in union with the father and the Holy Spirit) who humbled Himself to become the most vulnerable and tiniest human being, we all love so much, the baby Jesus.

The best description of the universe altering notion of the incarnation of God I have found is in the Perelandra trilogy by C.S. Lewis. This is science fiction, but it is distinctly Christian science fiction, in which the protagonist visits other worlds, and confronts God and Satan in various ways and places.

All of the characters on these other planets, are aware of us, and not because of anything that we humans have done. No, in fact, for them, our world remains clouded in shadow, and silent, compared to the rest of the worlds, because of what we have done and failed to do.

We are the fallen planet, and the title of the first book conveys this extra-terrestrial notion in its title, Out of the Silent Planet.

These other creatures, on other planets, are in another way aware of our world, because they know, that it is in our world, and only in our world, that God became mortal flesh, and dwelt among us. So as the silent planet, we also have a revered place, and the protagonist is surprised to find, that all of these creatures regard him with awe, as they recognize, that Jesus was one of us, not one of their kind, but one of us.

But while these others were aware of Jesus, while they had never known Him as we could, it was amazing to them, that not all of us know Him. He was in the world, in our world, yet the world did not know Him.

How can that be? The magnificence of this event is out of this world! Perhaps it is because it is so great, that it seems unimaginable to us, that we could convey it to others. But again, the Gospel teaches us otherwise. Because to all who receive this man, this Jesus, God, become a human being, He gives power to become children of God.

This is a phrase, that gets overused, or rather, used incorrectly by our society, people often say, we have to respect her, or him, because she is a child of God, without knowing if that person has received Jesus. Of course, as creations of the God we love, as fellow human beings, made in the image of God, all our brothers and sisters deserve our respect, and our love.

But the notion of being a child of God, as described here in the Gospel of John, is different. We who receive God among us, the Word made flesh who lived among us, are reborn by his Spirit, by the Holy Spirit, and become children of God.

Being Children of God is our unique honor, within the whole universe, unique to us, and with honor comes responsibility. For as the creator came into the world, and had the responsibility for it, so we who have become his children have special responsibility to all around us, as though we also were present in creation.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. And even after two thousand years, the world, to a great extent, does not know him. This is our responsibility, to make Him known to the world. We become Children of God, not for no particular purpose, but to participate in His purposes, and to make Him known to the world.

How do we do that? Howard Thurman said – “When the star of the sky is gone, when the shepherd are back with their flocks. The work begins... to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to rebuild the nations. To bring peace among people. To make music in the heart.”

It is not enough, to go around, as some do, and say “Jesus is the reason for the season.” That doesn't make Him known to the World, as anything other than one who would be bitter, about commercialization of his birthday. The Jesus we know, is much deeper than that. And Christmas, the coming of the Christ, into the world requires so much more of us as his followers.

We are doing many of those things here at Ascension, by feeding the hungry, through Fish housing the homeless, in Family Promise mentoring those struggling to get back onto their feet, with the Compassion Coalition raising children and youth to know and love the Lord, spreading his Word internationally through our mission work and partners. In all these ways we are helping the world come to know Him. Participating in the work of this Church, is one way you can make Him known.

It also takes our being conscious of our role as God's children, in everything we do, to make sure that God becomes known, whenever there is an opportunity. You know those, to whom Jesus is not known, you know the world that does not know Him. And you can make Him known, by introducing just one or two of them, to the Jesus you know.

“The hope (of Christmas) is we will permit the face of Jesus, the presence of Jesus, the glory of Jesus to carry out in us the transforming purposes for which he came to earth, for which he abides with us still. (Then we will be known as Children of God) Then we will be full of grace and truth as he is.” — Pamela Foster

Merry Christmas to you all, as you make Christ known to the world may your Joy be deep this year.