

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Christmas III; 25 December 2017
Epiphany Seattle – Todd Foster
(rev. 201712232056)

In the Beginning

[Thesis: The baby Jesus is the Creator of the Universe: the divine and the mundane are intermingled.]

In nomine...

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. (Jn 1.1ff. NRSV)

Merry Christmas!

Today is the first of 12 days the church has set aside to celebrate Christmas. That's not as many as the 50 days of Easter, but it's more than any other major feast day! These days we mark an amazing, unbelievable event that has changed the world forever. We celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus.

To tell the story and the meaning of the life of Jesus, the first Christians eventually settled on not one harmonized account, but four varied and occasionally even conflicting accounts of the life of Jesus. And while Matthew, Mark, and Luke generally cruise along in easy agreement and even verbatim borrowing one from the other, the Gospel of John, from which we read today, is an outlier.

Matthew and Luke give accounts of the birth of Jesus, emphasizing different details but mostly telling the same story. Mark introduces Jesus as an adult, being baptized by his cousin the Baptizer. But the writer of the Gospel of John wants to tell a much bigger story.

From St. Athanasius we have the saying, “God became human so that humans might become gods.”¹

Jesus, the Gospel of John reminds us, is not just a little baby lying in a manger. Jesus is not just a wandering rabbi, a wise and talented teacher, or a powerful prophet of God. Jesus is all these things, but none of these things exhaust who Jesus is. In fact, all of these things together do not even scratch the surface of who Jesus is. Jesus, tells us the Evangelist, is no less than the one God who is at the center of existence itself.

John isn’t talking about a little tribal god with a lower-case “g.” He’s not talking about the god worshiped by some particular sect or tribe or nation. He’s not talking about the god of the accountants or the god of the all who make their living upon the sea. John is talking about the Creator of everything that is: the source and sustainer of everything which exists. This is a universal god, and this god’s reign extends to every corner of the universe, from star to mineral to plant to complex organism, to a speck of dust or even the empty vacuum of space. These are all God’s, all created in and by and with and through God, all fulfilling God’s eternal and holy purpose. All things, and certainly all people, are sacred.

And God became human.

God created human beings in God’s own image. But we human beings forgot that we were the recipients of divine favor. We’re so used to a market economy where “there’s no such thing as a free lunch” that we’ve forgotten the meaning of the term grace. We have a tendency to forget that we are loved, fully and deeply and completely, not because we are such great people, but because God is such a great God!

So God expressed God’s self in Creation in a new way, as a human being named Jesus, in order to remind us of God’s presence with us, God’s solidarity with us, and God’s purpose with us.

The birth of Jesus was, from a human point of view, a reminder or a re-establishment of God’s sovereignty over and presence in Creation. The birth of Jesus was a reminder of the sacredness of all Creation. The birth of Jesus was a reminder that God lives within each of us, as beings created in God’s image. The birth of Jesus was a reminder that you are holy and beloved.

¹ Adapted from <http://www.antiochian.org/content/theosis-partaking-divine-nature>

God lives in and with you.

God is not aloof. God does not demand that we live up to a certain standard. God has already tipped God's hand and laid it out there. God has expressed God's love for us and God's solidarity with us. God has issued an open invitation to each of us that we might know God intimately in every moment of our lives. In sorrow and in joy, in pain and in good health, in success and failure, God is our constant companion, ready to hear us and respond.

This Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, the coming of God in the flesh to live among us and to sanctify time and space, all Creation and all humanity. God continues this work today and calls out to each of us in ways that we are uniquely prepared to understand. God is calling you to a life of relationship with God in this year to come. The liturgical year, the ways we worship together over time, is your guide to answering that call. John chapter 1 is a reminder of who it is that has issued that call.

I wish you each a Merry Christmas. May you be joined with Christ this year, even as he has joined with us in our humanity. You are God's Creation, God's beloved, and just as God entrusted God's self to be carried in Mary's womb and birthed into the world, so God delights to dwell in you.