

Sermon for December 29, 2024
The First Sunday after Christmas Day
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Psalm 147
Galatians 3:23-25;4:4-7
John 1:1-18

We are in the midst of Christmas. It's not over.
Today is the first Sunday after Christmas Day,
but it's also the Fifth Day of Christmas
– which means:
Five Golden Rings, four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves,
and a partridge in a pear tree.

As you all probably know, from the song if not tradition,
there are twelve days of Christmas.
Next Sunday will be the twelfth –
the day before the Feast of the Epiphany.

All these twelve days are a celebration of the Incarnation,
when God became human.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
I He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him, and without him
not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

In the beginning was a long time ago.
So what beginning is the Gospel of John talking about?
Given the estimated age of the universe,
the beginning was nearly fourteen billion years in the past.
The Earth is estimated to be four and a half billion years old.
Early humans, our direct ancestors, date back about 300,000 years.

I just saw a report about the James Webb Telescope imaged light
from an infant galaxy that was forming 650 million years after the Big Bang.
They're calling it the Firefly Sparkle Galaxy
because it reminds them of fireflies on a summer night.
And that's not the earliest image, that goes to 250 million years after the Big Bang.

In the beginning...

To understand the opening to the Gospel of John,
we have to understand its place in the rhythms of the New Testament,
look at each of the Gospels, and follow their paths to understanding
who Jesus the Christ was.

Remember, Christ is not Jesus' surname.

Christ is the Greek term for the Hebrew *Messiah*, which means "anointed." So who was Jesus the Christ?

The Gospel of Mark, we believe, was written first.

It appears second in the New Testament because originally
it was thought to be an edited version of the Gospel of Matthew
because of the similarities between the two.

Scholars now realize that Mark was one of the sources
for the author of Matthew.

In Mark the beginning of Jesus as the Christ comes at the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan by John the
Baptizer.

It was here that God opened the heavens and said:

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

It is interpreted that God adopts Jesus as Son because of his righteousness.

The Gospel of Matthew probably was written second.

Here we see the importance of the stars in displaying and foretelling
the Great happenings on Earth by their movements.

The Magi follow the star to find the child born to be King.

Matthew has been called the most Jewish of the Gospels,
and it is evident in the way the author crafts the story
to fit into the prophecies of the Old Testament,
and portrays Jesus as "fulfilling the Law."

If we look at the opening chapters of Matthew,

we find that the genealogy in Matthew traces the lineage of Jesus
back to the father of the Jewish people – to Abraham.

The Gospel of Luke was the third of the synoptic Gospels,
and takes different approach in talking about Jesus as the gift
to the outcast and poor of the world.

That's why the Angels appear to Shepherds,
and the lowest of the low are the ones who witness
Jesus' birth into the world.

In the early chapters of Luke,

the genealogy traces Jesus back beyond Abraham all the way to Adam. The portrayal is Jesus as a New
Adam,

which is reflected in Paul's characterization:

"As with man came sin, so as with a man comes the forgiveness of sin."

With the Gospel of John we see Jesus not as a human adopted by God,
or as the heir to the line of Abraham,
or even as the New Adam.

Rather in the Gospel of John we see Jesus as incarnated divinity
who was with God before the very creation of the world.

The Christ was with God before the Big Bang.

“In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

In Greek the word for Word is *Logos*.
Word is only one of the meanings for *Logos*.
The big Greek dictionary has two and a half pages of definitions for *Logos*.

My favorite definition for *Logos* is the divine conversation,
the cognitive relationship between human and divine,
the reasoning, the comprehending, the relational grasp
of concepts that mean more than mere words can express.

The *Logos* is the light come into the world,
and I prefer the King James’ response of the darkness
than that given in our lectionary.
In the NRSV translation
“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” But in the KJV,
“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.”

We are the darkness, and we do not comprehend the light.
The light brings the love of God into this world.

You see, love is what the power of God brings.
Love is not what power gives.
It’s so easy to forget in this season of Love and Light
that darkness threatened the Holy Family.
Saturday was the Feast of the Holy Innocents.
Although the event is not recorded in secular history,
the story of the massacre of the Innocents
is totally in keeping with what is known of Herod’s character:
“a man of great barbarity towards everyone.” [Josephus]

It is not surprising that the Wise Men’s report of the birth
of an infant King of the Jews caused him fear and anger.
To protect himself against being supplanted by an infant king,
Herod ordered the slaughter of all male children under two years of age
in Bethlehem and the surrounding region.
No one knows how many were killed,
but the Church has always honored these innocent children as martyrs.

That is the darkness that cannot comprehend the light:
Darkness where the slaughter of the innocent blood
repeats age after age around the world
under the labels of a “final solution,” ethnic cleansing, genocide
or just collateral damage.
We here in this country witness the continuing slaughter
in school shootings, drive-by killings. Slaughter upon slaughter.
How long, O Lord, how long?
We desire justice.

We demand justice.
We ask that the voices of the innocent be heard.
Voices, as the Scripture say, crying in the wilderness.

Isaiah wrote about that desire for justice
and the coming of the light as the vindication of Jerusalem
and the light of salvation.

And Paul writing in Galatians foresees the light of Christ
as the personification of faith.

Paul's talking all about the light being the coming of freedom and salvation.
"Now before faith came..." he writes, we were bound by the law,
but now we are freed as heirs of the promise
of the inheritance of the Father's love.

Paul writes of the promise in the section that is left out of today's reading. In the section that's left out we hear that for Paul:

"in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

The reality is that in the light and love of Christ:

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free,
there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

And just as the chosen people are children of the promise,
so "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring,
heirs according to the promise."

The promise is that we will not be forever surrounded by darkness.
As our lives grow fuller into the light of Christ,
we see more clearly and watch as the darkness diminishes, little by little.

Fr. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest,
talks about God loving the world so much,
but that over the years we grew to fear God for all the wrath
attributed to God in the Old Testament.
Rohr and Franciscan theology maintain God sent Christ into the world
so that we might see the loving face of God in human form.

Even in the darkness we seek to see the loving face of God.

Love is a gift.
It is tangible.
It is real.

In the beginning, from then of ages past to the now of the not yet
– Love is the Logos,
the Word that was born of Mary and has spread to all the world.

It is the gift we share with each other:
The love of God for all God's people.

This Love is the perfect Christmas present
made perfect again in that little child – the son of Mary.