

The First Sunday after Christmas



And the Word became flesh and
lived among us.

HYMN

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth receive her King:
let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the world! the Savior reigns: let us our songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy
repeat the sounding, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found
far as the curse, far as, far as the curse is found*

*He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness, and wonders of his love
and wonders of his love, and wonder, and wonders of his love.*

(Isaac Watts 1674-1748)

Behold, the dwelling of God is with mankind. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them, and be their God. *Revelation 21:3*



Lord, open our lips, and our mouth shall proclaim you praise.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Alleluia. To us a child is born: Come let us adore him. Alleluia.

A CANTICLE OF ISAIAH

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.
For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Psalm 147:13-21

Laudate Dominum

13 Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; *
praise your God, O Zion;
14 For he has strengthened the bars of your gates; *
he has blessed your children within you.
15 He has established peace on your borders; *
he satisfies you with the finest wheat.
16 He sends out his command to the earth, *
and his word runs very swiftly.
17 He gives snow like wool; *
he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.
18 He scatters his hail like bread crumbs; *
who can stand against his cold?
19 He sends forth his word and melts them; *
he blows with his wind, and the waters flow.
20 He declares his word to Jacob, *
his statutes and his judgments to Israel.
21 He has not done so to any other nation; *
to them he has not revealed his judgments.
Hallelujah!

THE LESSON

John 1:1-18

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. 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.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

[Other assigned reading for this Sunday: Galatians 3:23-25; 4:3-7]

REFLECTION

by

Norm Wright

+ In the Name of the Word made flesh. +

The Gospel of John presents us with a theological narrative that utilizes various stories found within the Synoptic Gospels and some found only in John. The Gospel of John begins with the incarnation of God the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and ends with resurrection of Jesus Christ as the *only* Son of God. As the narrative in which Incarnation story is explained, we consider two lines from this morning's lesson, the familiar "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us*" and "*It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*"

In last Sunday's reflection, we read Luke's account of the annunciation of Jesus's birth in the light of Mary's Aaronic lineage as Gabriel described Mary's pregnancy in terms of her serving as a tabernacle to house the presence of God in her soon to be born son, Jesus. The Greek word used in John to describe the incarnate Word as having "lived" or "dwelt" among us is a translation of *ἐσκήνωσεν* (pronounced *es-kay-no-sen*). This Greek word literally means to dwell in a tent and has been interpreted by some as "tabernacled." In John's interpretation of the Incarnation as the Word made flesh living among us, we see the connection between Jesus being born as the living Tabernacle who embodied the covenantal (promised) presence of God and Mary who served as the temporary Tabernacle who bore God's presence in the baby taking shape in her womb.

The point of both Mary and Jesus being described as a tabernacle (a tent) is that a tent is movable. It brings to mind the Exodus. While the Israelites moved about the wilderness, the Tabernacle, where the presence of God dwelled, went with them also. It was a visible sign and symbol of God being present with them during their journey to the Promised Land. As such, Jesus is the sign and symbol of God's indwelling presence not only amongst us but also tabernacled within us to demonstrate that God goes where we go.

The Gospel of John is not a stand-alone Gospel. It depends on its readers having knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth's story found in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in order to make sense of its theological portrayal of Jesus. The Gospel of John is what I would describe as an in-house Gospel; in that, it was written with those who are followers of Jesus and those who desire to deepen their understanding of Jesus in mind.

One of the ways the Gospel of John deepens our understanding of Jesus is to speak of him in terms of being God the "*only*" Son. You might recall the closing sentence of my Christmas reflection, "So let us... adore one of our kind who is one of a kind, Emmanuel, God with us." Jesus being one of kind is the literal translation of the Greek word used in John's original gospel text, *μονογενής* (pronounced *mon-og-en-ace*).

This word is often interpreted as "only" or as "only begotten;" as God the *only* Son in the last sentence of today's lesson. *Μονογενής* is only used in the scriptures attributed to John when referring to Jesus as the Son of God. Its use can be misunderstood as meaning Jesus is the only child of God. That is not how this term is used in John. John is clear in today's lesson that we too have "*power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God*" The use of God the *only* Son has a history.

"God the *only* Son" was intentionally designed to defy the notion of anyone other than Jesus of Nazareth laying claim to that title. This was particularly important at the time the Gospel of John was being written, since each Roman emperor was

worshiped as a “Son of God” (in a pagan sense); that is, bearing the divine genius (a divine essence or presence) in their being an emperor.

Jesus is one of a kind; in that, being one of our kind he came into our history to be for us the Tabernacle of God’s presence and to reveal and reintroduce us to God as our Father. The Gospel of John offers us a cosmological perspective of Jesus Christ as not only God with us but also God in us, and we in God. [See John 15]

With what we know today about the universe, the one of a kind-ness presented in Jesus is also reflective of who we are. We know that within the universe there are uncountable galaxies with innumerable solar systems and planets. While the possibility exists, to date, not a single planet has been discovered that supports life as we know it.

That this creative Word, which brought everything into being, chose to create us on this lovely speck of cosmic dust we call home gives one a sense that we and everything sharing life with us on this speck are *μονογενῆς*, a one of kind creation. That God loved us so much to intimately engage with what has to be an almost undetectable microscopic speck in the vast array of creation in order to prove to us that we are uniquely and deeply loved is extremely humbling. On this Sunday, let us continue to peer into the manger at Bethlehem to cherish and ponder the deep and immense love of God wrapped in one of our own peering back at us.

Amen

Hymn

*Of the Father's love begotten, ere the world began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he, of the
things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore!*

*Of that birth forever blessed, when the Virgin full of grace
by the Holy Ghost conceiving, bore the Savior of our race;
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer, first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore!*

*Let the heights of heaven adore him; angel hosts, his praises sing
powers, dominions, bow before him, and extol our God and King;
let no tongue on earth be silent, every voice in concert ring,
evermore and evermore!*

*Christ, to thee with God the Father, and, O Holy Ghost, to thee,
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving, and unwearied praises
be; honor, glory and dominion, and eternal victory,
evermore and evermore!*

(Marcus Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, 348-410)



THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE COLLECT OF THE DAY

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a tabernacle prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of Love, we pray for the whole Church and our parish family. Guide your Church and this parish in the way of truth and love.

God of Healing, we pray for all those who are suffering from the effects of Covid-19. We pray for those in church family and those requesting our prayers: Bernard, Sue, Pat Christensen, Bev Ann, Max Hawk, Pat Michels, Jolene, Darold Adamson, Somer, Ryan and for those we hold in our heart. May all those in need experience the comfort and healing of your presence.

God of Joy, we pray for those celebrating anniversaries: Scot and Mary Sorensen (Dec. 29) May they find joy, happiness, and fulfillment in the coming year.

God our Protector, we pray for those affected by Covid-19; for healthcare workers around the world; for those who provide essential services, first responders, fire fighters, police. We pray for

the leaders of all nations, for all government officials every where, and for all those making decisions in times of crisis. Grant them protection and guide those in authority to make wise decisions.

God our Defender, we pray for the homeless and the jobless in our nation, and for those who have lost their homeland, their sense of security, and who find themselves dependent on the good will of others here at home and in strange lands; that their needs are met and grant them the comfort of your Holy Spirit.

God of Life, we pray for those who have died. May all the departed find life in you.

God of Mission, we pray for all bishops, priests, deacons, and all who serve your Church. Grant them guidance in their various ministries and guide us in our mission to enlarge the Family of Faith in our midst.

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility your dominion may increase until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

THE PRAYER FOR MISSION

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent you blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near; Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into you fold; pour out you Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of you kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



**MAY THE LORD BLESS US AND KEEP US.
MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON US AND BE
GRACIOUS UNTO US.
MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON US AND GIVE US
PEACE. AMEN**

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