

Sermon, December 24, 2021

John 1:1-14

“And the Word Became Flesh”

In today’s reading John writes of a powerful force called the Word. The idea of the Word was first expressed in Ancient Greek philosophy where the Word, or Logos, was understood as a divine force that created order out of chaos, which is not unlike the Spirit in Genesis sweeping over the formless void called the deep, which can also be understood as chaos. From this formless void the world came into being.

In the opening passage of Genesis, we hear that, “darkness covered the face of the deep”, and God said, “Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness”. In John it says, “what has come into 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 both cases there is the separation of light and dark, but whereas the light of Genesis separates us from physical darkness, John speaks of our separation from spiritual darkness.

And just as in Genesis life comes from the breath of God, in John life comes from the light, which is the Word - which is also the Son. Which brings us to John’s claim that “the Word became flesh”, which we refer to as the Incarnation. Of the four gospels John’s is the only one that suggests the pre-existence of Jesus. By that I mean that Christ existed from the very beginning of all things. However, I believe that this should not be understood as saying that the person, Jesus of Nazareth, existed from the beginning. Instead, we can say that the Word, or the Wisdom of God, somehow, in a wonderful and miraculous way, became embodied in the person, Jesus of Nazareth - and I do emphasize the word “became”. In other words, that which was “in the beginning”, entered into human history in a very unique way - becoming known to us in Jesus Christ.

And this is why this prologue to John’s gospel becomes very important, because it establishes the central theme of the gospel as a whole - which is - that the words and deeds of Jesus are the words and deeds of God. Again, as Jesus said to the disciple, Phillip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!” What that suggests is not that we see the Father in the physical sense of seeing, but that in Jesus’ words and deeds we see the will of God, and in Jesus we see the love of God, and as our reading points out we see the grace and truth of God. As John says, Moses gave to us God’s law - Jesus gave us God’s grace and truth. When we recognize that and accept Christ in our hearts, we become a new creation!

This evening we celebrate and recall the image of a newborn babe lying in a bed of straw, one who has come into the world in the simplest of settings - a darkened stable filled with the sounds of lowing cattle and bleating sheep - a peasant husband and wife, and some local shepherds in from the fields. Yet there is something special here. Angels are softly singing up above, and in that darkened room lies a child who is, in fact, the embodiment of light - a new light, a light intended to illumine a new and different path for humankind - a light that shines forth out of the Word- the Word of creative and transformative power - a Word that proclaims the love of God revealed through that infant - the Word made flesh.

But this is not where the Incarnation ends. Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended to sit at the right hand of God. But he commissioned us to carry on that which he began. When we as individuals, and as a collective, place our trust in him and commit to following the path he set before us, we become the Body of Christ - we become the bearers of the Word - the Word made flesh. And just as he is a light for the world, he passes the torch unto us. As he says in the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 5:16), let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." On this very holy night of the year let us commit ourselves to be that light! Amen.

Let us pray: God, every loving and gracious, we are grateful that in the creative aspect of your being, that which is called the Word, all that is came into being, and in that world you brought light to illuminate the beauties of creation in a world in which we live and breathe and have our being. We also celebrate the gift of your Son who embodied your Word and became a different form of light - a light that liberates us from a spiritual darkness that does not allow us to recognize your presence in the world, trapping us in the ways of sin and death. But through the light revealed in the person of Jesus Christ it is possible for us to be a new creation - a creation that knows the ways of grace and truth. Give to us the faith to walk the ways illumined by that holy light, allowing that light to shine before others through us that they may see the depths of your love. Amen.