

In Jesus we know God and are known by Him

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
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Well Merry Christmas everyone!! Today we celebrate the day when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We celebrate that Jesus, the Son of God, comes to us. Emmanuel, God with us. The prologue to John's gospel we have just heard read is one of the most sublime passages in scripture.

I have recently been reading a popular science book called *Deep Simplicity: Chaos, Complexity and the Emergence of Life*. You know one of those books that talks about quarks, and relativity and parallel universes and you cannot understand any of it but you feel very virtuous reading it! One thing that always strikes me about those books is how different the current scientific worldview is from the early Christian writers. Science as we know it did not exist back then. When John wrote his Gospel everyone believed that the earth was flat. They believed that it was supported on four pillars and that a canopy was hung over the sky that separated the waters above from the waters below. Swirling around the four pillars were chaotic dangerous waters. And if they had bothered to add it all up they would have concluded, just as our biblical literalists have concluded, that the earth is only 6,000 years old. Dinosaurs, bacteria, viruses, Australia, America and Antarctica had not been discovered—amongst a thousand other things.

So what do we know about universe now? Well a whole lot more but proportionally not as much. That is I think the people of Jesus time knew much more about much less and we know much less about much more. Do you want to think about that for a minute? Here are some of the facts about our universe that we have begun to understand. Our planet, which is round, not flat, is one planet circling a star in one galaxy. Each galaxy has billions and billions of stars. The universe has billions and billions of galaxies. I don't know about you but I find this stuff just mind-boggling.

In the face of such awe-inspiring data, what happens to our image of god or to the way we might think about God? What does it mean to say, "God is everywhere"? What does it mean to talk about a God heaven?

What does it mean to say the "in the beginning the Word was with God?" and, "the word became flesh and dwelt among us?" That of course is the fundamental message of Christmas, that the Word, Jesus the Son of God, became human and lived as one of us. This means that God became Jesus who was a little baby, wet his nappy, messed his pants, burped, threw up, cried and winged in the synagogue at age two, and later drove his parents crazy during the worship services. Do you get that? God creates a universe of unimaginable complexity and size and then some time billions of years later Jesus, the Son of God, turns up in a stable in Bethlehem. What I find amazing is John's prologue; this abstract, philosophical piece of prose we are considering, helps us understand. Not in a scientific way, but in a poetic, imaginative way.

It says "In the beginning was the Word; the Word became flesh." The Greek word for Word is "logos" from which we get our word, logic. So you could translate our opening sentence "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" as, "In the beginning was the logic and the logic was with God and the logic was God." Another way to look at it—and one more in keeping with John's idea—is that if God is the idea, then the word is what speaks the idea. And this word creates. If God is love then Jesus is loving and a loving that creates a reality. In Hebrew the word for "Word" is 'dabar'. "Dabar" is not just a noun, the name for something. Dabar is a verb and it means something that is active and creative. So when God speaks at the beginning of Genesis, his words create – earth and heavens, stars and moons, animals and plants and humans. So "Word" in the bible is a rich, complex, wonderful

idea of creative power that existed before anything. It is this creative power becoming flesh that we celebrate today.

John's gospel then goes on to tell us that the Word, this creative, conscious power became flesh. The creative, conscious power of the universe became a full human being—body, mind and spirit. And why?

Well the simple answer is love. God becoming flesh is part of the great cosmic story. Love creates, love gives, love joins us on the human journey, love sacrifices and love saves. There are many ideas that flow from this idea of love in the world, the idea that became flesh. Here is just one.

Let me suggest that if God, in fact, has come to this earth to live as we have to live, if God has experienced life the way we have to experience it, then it means that we can believe that God understands, that none of our experiences are strange to God. There is no longer a remote sense that God is above and outside us, but there is this incredible sense that God understands from within what it's like to be a human being, to struggle as we have to struggle and, therefore, can give us grace to help in our times of trouble.

A play by a German Lutheran Pastor, Guenter Rutenborn, written in 1945, highlights this particular aspect of Christmas. The play begins with a group of refugees, displaced persons, milling around, asking who's to blame for the horrible tragedy of the war. Some said Hitler was to blame; others said, "No, it was the munitions manufacturers who financed him." Others said it was the apathy of the German people, but then suddenly a man comes up out of the crowd and says, "Do you want to know who is really to blame for all the suffering we've been through? I'll tell you. God is to blame. He is the one that created this world. He is the one who has let it be what it is." And everybody catches up the chorus. They turn with one voice to say, "God is to blame. God is to blame."

And so in the play, God is brought down onto the stage and is put in the dock, and God is tried for the crime of creation. He is found guilty and the judge says, "The crime is so severe that there are going to have to be the worst of all sentences. I hereby sentence God to have to live on this earth as a human being." And the three archangels are given the task of carrying out the sentence.

The first archangel walks to the end of the stage and says, "I'm going to see to it when God serves His sentence that He knows what it's like to be obscure and to be poor. He will be borne at the back of no-where with a peasant girl for His mother. He will have to live as a Jew in a Jew-hating world."

The second archangel starts out and says, "I'm going to see to it when God serves his sentence that He knows what it's like to fail and to suffer disappointment. No one will ever understand what He is trying to do." The third archangel said, "I'm going to see to it when God serves His sentence that He knows what it's like to suffer. I'm going to see to it that He has all kinds of physical pain. At the end of His life, He's going to be executed in as painful a way as possible."

And with that the three archangels disappear. The houselights go down, and it suddenly dawns on you that God has already served that sentence. He knows what it's like to live as a human being. There is nothing that you or I will face today that is going to be strange to God. There is nothing that we will face in the year ahead that God cannot comprehend. Therefore, the great message of Christmas is that God, the creator of the universe, became what we are, so that we could understand better what God is, and we could believe with all our hearts that God understands what we are, who we are and loves us beyond belief. This has got to be Good News! Amen.