

Christmas 1
December 30, 2018

In the name of the God of all Creation
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,
And the power of God known in the Spirit.
Amen.

This is the Sunday after Christmas. This is the Sunday when we read the Prologue to John's Gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
(John 1:1)

Most scholars believe this to be an ancient hymn. Even in modern English of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible one can recognize a certain rhythm ... a cadence ... which, it seems, is much more pronounced in the ancient Greek in which it was written. Also, ancient Greek poetry would end one line, and begin the next line, with the same word ... a feature lost to our modern English translations of the original language. Yet, it not difficult to imagine these words as a hymn to God's glory, and a poetic expression of the incarnation of the essence of God called the *logos* ... the Word.

"In the beginning was the Word,"

We have a tendency to define "word" as merely an element of speech in either written or spoken speech. However, the original Greek that is translated here as *logos* has a much deeper and significant meaning. *Logos* is the root of the word *logic*. To Stoic Greek philosophers the term meant the divine animating principle pervading the universe. The author of John's gospel borrowed the idea ... *logos* ... and equated this principle with Jesus.

It is this *logos* ... this divine animating principle pervading the universe ... it is this *logos* that became incarnate and brings light in the darkness. It is this *logos* that became incarnate that gives us the "power to become children of God." And, it is this *logos* that became incarnate that "lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

This is indeed poetry ... the makings of a hymn. It is a hymn about the power of God to enter into this life as a spiritual reality. That spiritual reality was alive in Jesus 2,000 years ago... and that spiritual reality is alive in us today. That is the glory to which the hymn speaks.

This Prologue to John's Gospel proclaims that "the Word became flesh, and lived among us." It proclaims the integrity of God. It proclaims a life that is lived consistent with the faith and values one possesses. Yet all too often these words of belief are merely proclaimed and not fully lived out with commitment. All too often people will "talk" the "talk," but then don't

“walk” the “walk.” How often do we sing our hymns, and pray our prayers, and recite our creeds, and then turn around and live a life less than what God intends for us to live? How many times do we offer our thanks to God for the forgiveness given us through Jesus ... the “Word made flesh” ... and then turn to our neighbor and continue to hold a grudge? We praise God for becoming incarnate in Jesus. How can we turn those words of praise into lives consistent with the faith that we proclaim? What does it take to “walk” the “walk?”

This is not just the Sunday after Christmas ... it is also Sunday before New Year’s Eve ... the last day of 2018. As we turn the page of the calendar into a new year it is customary to look retrospectively at the past, and with anticipation to the new. This self-reflection may happen for us whether it is January 1, or on our birthday, or the anniversary of some life event ... remembering that first date, a graduation, or a wedding, or a new job. It could just as well be the remembering of an accident, or the diagnosis of a disease, or the loss of a job, or a divorce, or the death of some one dear to you. Like New Year’s Eve, these become occasions to look back on the year past and forward to the year to come. Some of the memories are joyful, and some are sad ... and some of the anticipation of the future is filled with hope, yet for some that anticipation may include despair, fear ... perhaps even dread.

It seems to me that we can look at the past year ... whether it be the year 2018, or a year marked by an anniversary ... and make a list of the events that occurred. Making a list like this would be an objective retrospective. However, it feels to me that something valuable is lost in a mere objective list ... who was I in the midst of those events? Did I respond in a way that is consistent with who I believe that I am ... a manner that is consistent with my faith and values? In other words, did I act with integrity so that my actions reflected the person I claim to be? Did I “walk” the “walk?”

By asking these questions we open the opportunity to look at new possibilities for the future. This isn’t about grading our performance ... did I excel, or merely pass, or possibly fail? If that is all that we do we may become either arrogant on the one hand, or we beat ourselves up on the other. However, if we ask ourselves the question, “What might I have done differently?” it opens opportunities to become more than we are at this moment, and we get closer to the image of God in which we are made.

And what about the year to come? What is in store for you and for me. Surely there are those dates that were set a long time ago, but there are also the surprises ... both joyful and frightening. If we choose to be centered in who we are, and centered around the faith and values that inform our identity, then we can anticipate the future as an adventure that may take us to new frontiers of the life that God has given us. Those frontiers may be awe inspiring vistas, but they could just as likely be fright-provoking dark alleyways. Again, it is not the objective events themselves that we anticipate, rather the possibilities that each event offers an opportunity to respond with integrity ... and integrity grounded in our faith.

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.

The *logos* of God became human in the person of Jesus. We, too, have the opportunity to incarnate God's *logos* by living the faith that has been given us and not merely proclaiming empty words. There will be times when we fall short of our goal ... we will be less than generous ... we may not share our blessing ... we will not forgive as easily as we are called to forgive. But each time we fall short becomes an opportunity to see a new possibility of what we can be.

I encourage you to incarnate God's *logos* in your life as Jesus did in his. Tomorrow ... on this New Year's Eve ... or at that time during the year that seems most appropriate ... take a look back and ask your self, "What might I have done differently?" And as you look to the future ask yourself, "How might my faith in which I am centered, and which is my grounding, be more than mere words and become the incarnate *logos* of God?"

May your New Year be filled with much wonder and many blessings.

Amen.