

**The First Sunday After Christmas
December 29, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all Creation
... the One who brought us into being
The God alive in each of us
... as God was alive in Jesus
And the power of God known in the Spirit
... the Spirit who blessed Mary with God's Son.
Amen.**

I hope all of you had a blessed Christmas Day. I hope that if any of you traveled, or your families and friends traveled, that you were safe. And, I hope that you are well rested and ready to face the week ahead ... and that you will welcome the New Year with a spirit of wonderment.

The gist of the sermon is the same as each of my Advent sermons, and also my Christmas Eve sermon ... Christmas is not just about an event that happened 2,000 years ago. Christmas is about God coming alive in this world ... and coming alive to dwell in you and me.

On Christmas Eve we heard the story of the Nativity of Jesus from Luke's gospel. Next week, on the Second Sunday of our Christmas season, we will hear from the gospel of Matthew the story of the visit of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. The Gospel of Luke also includes a genealogy for Jesus that reaches all the way back to Adam. Matthew includes a genealogy as well ... one that links Jesus to Abraham, the father of the faith, and to David, the anointed King of Israel. Of course, the gospel of Mark does not have a nativity story at all, rather it opens with a quote from Isaiah that references an image of a precursor who will announce the coming Messiah ... the role that John the Baptist then fulfills. The synoptic gospels of Luke, Matthew, and Mark, root Jesus in an historical context.

Then there is the reading we heard this morning ... the opening of John's gospel, an ancient hymn that is known as the Prologue of John. In this prologue, John speaks of the *logos* ... translated in our English language Bibles as the *Word*.

*In the beginning was the Word [the logos], and the Word [logos] was with God, and the Word [logos] was God.
(John 1:1)*

Those four letters ... "w-o-r-d" ... in our English speaking world today usually means that letters are combined to form symbols that become ink on paper, or electronic pixels on a computer screen. We call these strings of letters "words." Because of this, I think the power of the way the Greek term *logos* is translated in John's gospel is diluted. In the ancient world the term *logos* carried considerable currency. For the Stoics the *logos* was the principle of reason that

governed the universe. It is possible that John understood **logos** as a translation of the Hebrew **dabar**, a word used to describe God's activity in the world. At the same time, **logos** could also be read as divine wisdom ... **hokma** in Hebrew and **sophia** in Greek. According to the rabbis, wisdom ... **sophia** ... was responsible for creation, and equally important, **sophia** was an expression of Torah ... just take a look at the Book of Proverbs. All this means that the **logos** hymn expresses the universality of the gift that became incarnate in Jesus.

As I mentioned, most scholars believe that the Prologue of John's gospel is an ancient hymn. Even in the 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. And, 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 is 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.

What John's gospel is telling us in this hymn is that it is this **logos** that became incarnate and that 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 can dwell in us today. That is the glory to which the hymn speaks.

Most people ... including many scholars, but not all ... read into this prologue the equation that Jesus Christ and the **logos** are the same thing ... they have the same identity. When read this way, Jesus Christ was there at the beginning of Creation, and then came alive in this world 2,000 years ago.

However, there are those who identify the **logos** not with any one human, but rather as the very essence of God ... the principle behind the Creation ... the Divine Spirit that gives order to everything in the universe. In this understanding, the **logos** is **IN** everything, and everything is **IN** the **logos**. Then, 2,000 years ago, the fullness of the **logos** came alive in the human being named Jesus ... and Jesus lived fully into that **logos** ... that is why he is Jesus the Christ.

*"And the Word [**logos**] became flesh and lived among us ..."*

The **logos** of God became human in the person of Jesus. We, too, have the opportunity to incarnate God's **logos**. For me, that is what our faith is all about. That essence of God ... that principle behind the Creation ... that Divine Spirit that gives order to everything in the universe ... that **logos** is just as available to you and me as it was to Jesus.

This **logos** is the “image of God” in which each of us is made. This isn’t about worshipping the **logos** ... or about worshipping God ... or worshipping Jesus Christ. It is about living the **logos** ... by living the faith that has been given us, and not merely proclaiming empty words.

Imagine if you will a wine enthusiast who purchase a fine wine from and outstanding vineyard bottles in a particularly great year. If the wine enthusiast shares that wine with friends, and they all enjoy the wine, everyone is drawn closer by the shared experience, and by the generosity of the wine enthusiast.

However, if the wine enthusiast puts the wine away in the wine cellar to keep as an investment, or keeps this particular bottle of wine is an object of pride, it becomes nothing more than an idol to look at ... it has no functional value.

The same is true with this Divine Spirit ... the essence of God ... the **logos** that is available to each of us. God can be worshipped as an idol. Or, God can be lived. When God is lived the way that Jesus lived the **logos** then the world is drawn closer in the generosity of that shared experience.

We are called to live into the fullest image of our Creator ... into the **logos**. Yes, there will be times when we fall short of our goals. There are times when we will not fully live into the image of God. There will be times when we will be less than generous ... when we may not share our blessings ... when we will not forgive as easily as we are forgiven ... and called to forgive. However, each time we fall short becomes an opportunity to see a new possibility of what we can be ... of what that Divine Spirit might look like if it were to become alive in us ... of what the **logos** might look like if it were incarnate in us.

On this Sunday after Christmas Day I encourage you to incarnate God’s **logos** in your life as Jesus did in his. And on this Sunday before New Year’s I encourage you to take a look back at the year past and ask yourself, “What might I have done differently?” Then, as you look to the future and the year ahead 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.

*¹In the beginning was the **logos** ... the Divine Spirit in all things, and the **logos** ... this essence ... was with God, and the **logos** ... Divine Spirit ... was God. ²The **logos** ... the essence that orders the universe ... was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through this Divine Spirit, and without this Divine Spirit not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in this essence of God was life, and the life was the light of all people.*