

**The First Sunday After Christmas
December 26, 2021**

**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.**

I hope all of you had a blessed Christmas Day. Once again, this was a different kind of Christmas for many of us ... seeing family by FaceTime, or Skype, or Zoom ... missing the hugs and closeness that this holiday can offer. If any of you traveled to visit family, I pray that you are safe, and if any of you had family travel to visit you, I also pray that you are safe.

Today, in the UK and parts of Europe, is Boxing Day. It is the day after Christmas ... which, by the way, is also the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Boxing Day was when those with financial resources gave “boxes” of gift to their servants, or the proprietors of shops they frequented ... butcher, baker, candlestick maker, etc. When Boxing Day falls on a Sunday ... as it is this year ... it is the occasion for putting an extra contribution in the Alms Box. Our Alms Box is on the wall right next to the door, and the funds received are then distributed to those in need. However, in many countries Boxing Day is a national holiday, and has become “Shopping Day” ... their version of Black Friday.

So, now you know something about Boxing Day if you did not know it before. However, today is also the First Sunday after Christmas, and the reading we just heard from John’s gospel is always the reading on this day.

John begins his gospel with “*In the beginning ...*” These are the same words that begin the Book of Genesis. For devout Jews just hearing that one word brings to mind the entire Creation story. So, it was not unintentional that the author of John’s gospel began his mystical proclamation about Jesus with the same words ... “*In the beginning ...*”

*In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.
(John 1.1)*

John wrote those words at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century, but any Jew hearing that opening would have immediately been aware of its relationship to the Creation story in Genesis.

This opening line is part of what is often called the Prologue of John’s gospel, and most scholars believe that this 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.

Much of the power of this hymn is lost to us through the simple translation of the Greek "*logos*" into the English "word ... w-o-r-d." 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, the power of the Greek term *logos* is diluted by its translation into English.

In the ancient world, the term *logos* carried considerable authority and significance. 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 Rabbinical scholars, wisdom ... *sophia* ... was responsible for creation, and equally important, *sophia* was an expression of Torah ... the whole of the Law. All this means that the *logos* hymn expresses the universality of the gift that became incarnate in Jesus.

Many people read into John's 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 human form in this world 2,000 years ago.

However, there are also 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.

The Church has had a difficult relationship with Science for millenniums ... just think of Galileo being excommunicated from the Church because he claimed the theory of Copernicus that Earth was not the center of the universe. Today, there are many who still read the Creation story as literal fact ... God created the world in six days ... and the science of prehistoric archeology is heretical.

However, there are theologians today who have wedded their faith with 21st century science. If Creation started with the Big Bang, argues Matthew Fox ... a former Roman Catholic priest turned Episcopal priest ... then every atomic particle contains the entire essence of the Divine, and this Divine presence is also the sum-total of every individual particle of this vast universe. Thus, we ... who are made up of specks of stardust ... have the full essence of God in each of us. And, we ... as individual parts of this universe, are in God. Thus, every element of Creation is holy ... all of it ... every little tiny piece of sand ... and every smidgen of every living cell.

Instead of God being outside of our universe directing all that happens, Matthew Fox is saying that God is in everything in the universe, and everything in the universe is in God.

So my question is, how did the author of John's gospel know this when he was writing just a few decades after Jesus lived. Is not John's Prologue ... this hymn ... a poetic, mythical, and mystical telling of the Creation and God's presence in it?

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

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 spiritual reality can dwell in us today. That is the glory to which the hymn speaks.

"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, for that matter, 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.

I've used this example before, but imagine, if you will, a wine enthusiast who purchases a fine wine from an outstanding vineyard ... one that was of exceptional vintage. 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 as 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.

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?"

As we leave 2021 behind, and move into a New Year, may you be filled with much wonder and many blessings. May you be safe, and may you be well. To paraphrase a portion of John's Prologue:

What has come into being through the logos was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

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. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.*