

12-31-23 Christmas 1, Jn1,1-18

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On this first Sunday after Christmas the gospel lesson invites us to contemplate the meaning of Christ's birth into the world and the deeper mysteries of Christianity. It addresses two of the most important questions about Christian doctrine and belief. First: Who is Jesus? And, second: What is he doing here?

John's gospel begins with the words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [] All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." With these words, John is entering into a conversation about the nature of God that had already been going on for a couple of hundred years before the birth of Jesus.

One of the parties to this conversation was the great Jewish sage, Philo of Alexandria, who was born 15-20 years before Jesus. Philo attempted to explain the truth of

Judaism to the Greco-Roman world using the language of Greek philosophy, in particular, the language of Platonism and Stoicism. The Greeks maintained a view similar to that of the more modern Deists. They believed that God had indeed created the world, but after setting creation in motion He was no longer involved in the muck and drama of daily existence. The Jews, of course, believed that God remained passionately involved with his creation. Philo taught that, yes, although the Essence of God was necessarily beyond the realm of human experience and understanding, God continued to be active in creation by means of His Spirit and His Word, or “Logos,” as in, “In the beginning was the Logos.” Philo was the first to articulate the idea of God as Trinity.

Logos is a heavily charged word. Logos can be translated as “Word,” but it also refers to the “ratio,” or “the relationship between things”; it can mean “reckoning” (as in accounting) or “the reason that governs things.” We derive a number of English words from the Greek word

Logos: Logical, logistics, logarithm . . . just to name a few. In more modern terms, we might say that the Logos, or Word of God, both is and expresses itself through the laws of the universe, the laws of nature. The modern Franciscan, Richard Rohr, says you can think of the Logos as God's living Blueprint for creation. In Philo's thinking, the ***Spirit*** or Breath of God prepared creation by moving "over the face of the waters," and God's ***Word***, or Logos, was the active force of creation. We hear it in the opening chapter of Genesis: "And God ***said***, Let there be a firmament . . .", "And God ***said***, Let the waters [] be gathered together . . .", "And God ***said***, Let the earth bring forth . . .". God creates the universe by means of the Word, or, as St. John puts it:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [] All things came into being through the Word, and without God's Word not one thing came into being."

Now, as to “who Jesus is,” it is not quite correct to say that “Jesus was the Word.” Jesus did not exist from before all time. Jesus did not exist until he was conceived in Mary’s womb. This is a matter about which the early Christians were very insistent: Jesus was a human being, just like you and me. What was different about Jesus was that, from the beginning, God’s Eternal Word was incarnate *in* him. What on earth do we mean by that?

St. Gregory Nazianzus, a fourth century Christian, noted that God’s Incarnation in Jesus Christ was not the only Incarnation of God’s Word that is found in scripture. The manna which fed the children of Israel in the desert was, according to Nazianzus, an incarnation of God’s Word. And, he says, the Eucharistic meal, Holy Communion, is a place where God’s Word becomes Incarnate still.

You know, the Bible has precious little to say about what God is. In answer to Moses’ question, “Who are you?” God simply says, “I AM.” In St. John’s gospel, Jesus

enlarges our understanding a little when He says, “God is Spirit.” And in his first epistle, St. John says, “God is love.” I invite you to take that last statement of scripture absolutely literally. Love is the power behind all of creation.

God is love. God’s Spirit is the Spirit of love. And God’s Word is love in action.

So it is not wrong to say that the Word, which was with God and was God in the beginning, is Love.

Now listen to John’s words about the Incarnation again, substituting the word “love” for “logos.”, and see if they don’t begin to make some new sense to you:

“Love was in the world, and the world came into being through Love; yet the world did not know Love. Love came to what was its own, and its own people did not accept it. But to all who received Love, who believed in its name,

Love gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

John continues . . .

“And Love 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.”

So who is Jesus? Jesus was a normal human being, just like you and me. But God's Eternal Word, God's own active Love, was incarnate in him. This is why the Church affirms that Jesus is both fully human and fully God.

The next question is: **Why** did God become Incarnate in Jesus? John writes, “. . . to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” In other words, God -- Love -- became Incarnate in Jesus Christ, came so that we also might become Sons and Daughters of God; God became incarnate in Jesus

Christ so that, through Him, God might become incarnate in us.

Love is only love if it is tangible and real. It's one thing to say, "Oh, I care for the poor," and quite another to bring food, sit down and share a meal. Holy Communion, the Eucharist, is the feast of Love, where Love comes down and sits with us in the poverty of our existence. In the Eucharist we share love made real and tangible in bread and wine, sharing with one another and with God. Sharing food, sharing the very real healing power of Love, sharing ourselves with one another . . . Isn't that what Jesus did? Healing, feeding, giving Himself for others? Isn't that another way in which God's Word becomes Incarnate in the world? Through us?

The deepest mysteries of Christianity are really quite ordinary: God -- Love -- becomes incarnate in an ordinary human being, revealing what God intended human beings to be. Jesus, just an ordinary man, is so completely full of

God's love that in Him we see in him the fullness of God's own glory, "the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." This very same Love also is manifested to us and feeds us with ordinary wine and ordinary bread. Only, it is not ordinary; it is self-sacrificing love made real and tangible. God, who then is *in* us, goes forth from this place to share Love with the world.

It is all very ordinary, and for those with the eyes to see, it is stunningly extraordinary. Who is Jesus? One in whom God -- in whom Love -- is fully incarnate. What is the Son of God doing here? Redeeming us. Giving us the power to become fully human. Sharing with us the power to become Sons and Daughters of God, the power of God's Love to become incarnate in us.

In the beginning was the Word. The Word is Love. Love is the force which moves creation. Love is the power that comes into creation to redeem it and restore our lives to wholeness. Love is our Alpha and our Omega, our

beginning and our end. As it was in the beginning, is now,
and will be forever.