

Text: John 1: 1-18, Sirach 24:1-12, Howard Thurman – The symbol of Christmas

Title: The greening power of Christmas – Christ among us.

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Christmastide – 2nd Sunday after Christmas

Most Christmases I usually can't wait for my favourite radio stations to stop playing the Christmas music and get back to my favourite 80's, 90's. This year was a bit different. I found myself holding onto Christmas.

Turning it around like a gemstone – looking at all the hewn angles.

Today, I am drawn to 'Viriditas' – the greening power of God, the life force at work in all creation. Viriditas is the force sustaining life each moment, bringing newness to birth, it is an image of the divine power continuously at work in the world. An image thanks to the 12th century Benedictine, Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

This angle of Christmas – is also captured so well in John's gospel.

The Word (Divinity) became flesh, sarx (part of the creation order).

Tripp Fuller tells us that the word John uses for flesh is the word Sarx in the Greek language it is not simply a word for the human body but actually a word for all material creation. why is this so important?

The fusion of the will of Jesus with that of God has ramifications for all of creation
Imaging of the invisible God in a temporal world.

Tripp Fuller's podcast can be found here: <https://trippfuller.com/category/podcast/>

Today we get to hold these two wonders together – God among us (incarnation) and Creator's work of life itself.

Both say something to us of God's faithful commitment to the earth, the universe, the cosmos - God's self-investment in the world we know.

I need this reassurance today. On New Years Eve I too raised a glass and celebrated the movement into another year, with hope for a brighter one. Yet when we woke up on January 1st, I still put on my mask, kept my distance and used hand sanitizer throughout the day.

O how I need to hear that the Divine hasn't given up on us.
Thank goodness for Christmas.

A story is told of a nativity set

(with thanks to Ron Reed written by Bill Bunn from Pacific Theatre)

One Christmas a mother bought her children a plastic nativity set – the only gift to be opened ahead of Christmas – so that it could be set out in expectation for the birth. She wanted the kids to be able to get into the Christmas story by playing with the characters and all the parts.

The family set up the nativity set for all to see.

But the adults had forgotten about the democracy of toys. All toys regardless of symbolic value are created equal. And any toy may interact equally with any other... the sky is the limit or perhaps the imagination.

The story goes that one by one the nativity characters disappeared from the creche and could be found interacting with all the other toys:

- Baby Jesus was found visiting with the lego, frequented the company of the stuffed animals (though he looked a whole lot smaller), he was also found stuffed down the chimney of the doll house – as he was helping his brother Santa, and perhaps the most striking was seeing the baby Jesus driving the Barbie corvette!
- The wise men were also mingling – one was seen helping a farmer drive his tractor
- Mary was found with another wise man helping the firemen rescuing medieval soldiers from a burning wreck.

The story ends the following year with the father expressing his sadness that the nativity set wouldn't stay assembled like the picture on the box with Christ in his manger.

But he said – In our house I guess God can be touched – so there is no telling where he might end up.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Wisdom come among us.

That brooding Presence of the Eternal Spirit – as Howard Thurman in 1961 writes. It's the image of Divinity so involved with every bit of every part of living beings, the ups and downs and everything in between.

That even dead hopes can be stirred with the newness of life.

This reflection has given me pause for thought as I reflect over 2020

(with thanks to Lisa Cressman, Backstory Preaching).

Where did I experience the Spirit? That brooding Spirit as she breathing things into life for me?
What did she feel like? What did she look like?

Where were the crooked paths, the rough places?
What made my heart tired?

What did I learn about life, about love, about goodness that will move me differently as I walk
into the days ahead?

These are the incarnations of wisdom.
This is the Word made flesh in me. And in you.

For in that beautiful and ancient reading from Sirach – we hear of Wisdom – the personification
of the Divine – the feminine of God, coming near to us.

God is near.
Pay attention – there is yet a creative lifegiving force.
She calls us to look for fertility in barren places.
Viriditas

I will end with two questions. These two questions former President of the United States Barak
Obama used to ask communities who found themselves in tough places:

- What is the world you see?
- What is the world you would like to see?

Holy Wisdom
Open my eyes to bask in your beauty.
Open my mouth to speak tenderly.
Open my heart to feel your unconditional love.
Holy Wisdom
May I be YOUR image in the world.
Amen.

A prayer from the Sister's of Providence (<https://spsmw.org/prayer/holy-wisdom/>)