

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day
A Sermon Preached by Sr Greta Ronningen
on December 29, 2024

Isaiah 61.10-62.3 / Psalm 147.13-21 / Galatians 3.23-25; 4.4-7 / John 1.1-18

I absolutely love the Gospel of John the Evangelist, and particularly the stunning beginning that we just heard. No humble beginnings here, no mangers or shepherds in this version of the incarnation. Oh No. John evokes the elegant images of Genesis when God spoke over the waters to create light and to separate light from darkness. In this gospel John introduces the incarnate one as the Word of God, the emergence of a divine superstar. In John's mystical text the Word of God or Logos has always been with God and is sent by God.

The Greek word LOGOS is so much bigger and richer than our humble translation, WORD. This Logos might be imagined as God's Wisdom or God's creative force or the revealer of God. My New Testament professor, who also taught Greek, spent a lot of time drawing images on the blackboard to help us understand the meaning of LOGOS. He drew a circle and said this is God then he drew a huge amoeba type shape moving outward from the circle and told us that this is Logos which is everything emanating from the Divine Source or God. So, imagine the scripture this way, "In the beginning was The LOGOS or Creative Energy of God and this force was with God and this energy of creation was God. ... And this creative energy of God became flesh and lived among us..."

This is how John presents the incarnation which is more like what the great theologian and author Father Richard Rohr calls the Cosmic Christ. This offers a more awe inducing way to contemplate Jesus. Yes – I love the humbleness of Jesus and his coming to us as a mere human, but I also love this cosmic imagery that John evokes with his word Logos.

John's Gospel introduces us to Jesus as an all-powerful, transforming, enlightening, awe-inspiring, incarnation of God among us. Can we make space for

the greatness of this during this busy time of the year? Can we set aside the onslaught of holiday consumption for a minute and just sit quietly with today's mind-blowing scripture?

A good friend of ours, that is the Community of Divine Love's, is the interfaith author, Mirabai Starr. She has written a wonderful new book called *Ordinary Mysticism: Your Life as Sacred Ground*. In the book there is a section on AWE. She says that according to neuroscience when we experience awe our habitual mental impulses become quiet; we create a space for the quiet hush of appreciation. The ego lets go a bit and awareness of yourself as separate from others is lessened and you become more connected to a feeling of oneness with all that is. Think of it – when you see a spectacular sunset which there are plenty of around here, you feel what she calls a holy hush.

This passage is an invitation to holy hush or awe. We are invited to imagine the incarnation as Divine Creative Energy which has always been and through which all things came into being. And that this Divine Energy or Source of all that is, is the light of all the people.

It is also an invitation to participate in this Divine Source or Light. Which is not hard to do. Everyone knows how to be light in the world. In fact, I have a bright yellow baseball hat with dramatically bold black lettering that says: "Be the Light." Some people just ignore it but many beam a big smile at me and say thanks. We all know how to be the light in the world.

But do we? I know I spent most of my life buried in my ambition. I was too self-oriented to bother being light for myself or others. I was not awed easily either come to think of it. But one day I heard a sermon that hit me. It wasn't that it was so unusual but for some reason it broke through to my heart. It was about being God's love in the world. It was a wakeup call that I didn't even know I was waiting for.

It was 2008 and I was miserable. Things had not gone how I would have liked. I decided to give up on the path I was on and reinvent myself as a child of God. I sat down in the backyard on a pretty afternoon and simply asked, “What can I do for you God?” I sat quietly for until I heard within myself that I should be a chaplain. I had no idea what a chaplain did or how to become one, so I picked up the phone, called my priest, and asked him. He gave me the number of a man who ran a program at Good Samaritan Hospital in downtown Los Angeles. Then he said, “Why don’t you come here on Thursday, a prison chaplain is going to speak to our Sages group?”

I could hardly wait for Thursday to arrive. That day, sixteen almost seventeen years ago, I met Dennis Gibbs. Within the month I was walking into the LA County jails witnessing this kind wise man offer God’s love to men behind bars.

Since that day I have grown in ways I could not have imagined. My capacity for compassion has pushed the edges of my heart until it is like the Grinches – three sizes larger. I have found that by following the teachings of Jesus into service with the least I have experienced God’s eternal love. I am now happier than I have ever been and profoundly content and even joyful.

Service has been the door to my joy.

I know that many of you here do a great deal of service. I know that this church is dedicated to outreach in many ways. And I hope and pray that it brings you joy and fulfillment. If any of you are feeling too busy or just haven’t made it a priority in your life – I encourage you to consider making 2025 the year to change that. Imagine generously giving of your time for the wellbeing of others. I promise you it will be life-giving. There are so many ways to engage as there is so much need. A good place to start is to ask yourself what breaks my heart? Is it the elderly who are alone? Is it animals that need adopting or care? Is it the homeless on the streets? Is it parents caring for disabled children? Is it the migrant workers picking our food? There are so many ways you might bring light into the world. I suggest

starting modestly and keeping your commitments. It is not about overdoing – but what is right for you and doing it with love.

I want to end with one of my favorite poems of the season written by Howard Thurman

The Work of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.