

And the Word 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.

Truly a most important sentence in understanding our faith and the realities it enables. Although I confess it is one of those sentences that I simply can't shake the King James Version from my mind. ***The word became flesh and dwelt among us.*** "Dwelt" sounds so much more momentous than merely "lived". I must also say our passage is a curious choice on the part of the lectionary scholars for the Feast of the Annunciation. The feast commemorates the Angel Gabriel appearing to Mary to tell her that she will bear a son and his name shall be Jesus. But the Annunciation appears only in the Gospel according to Luke as, indeed, all the stories of the stable, no room at the inn, and shepherds around the manger are unique to Luke. The Wise Men appear in both Luke and Matthew but there are no nativity stories in Mark and John. Our passage from John this evening explains the arrival of the Word, but with no reference to his nativity in Jesus.

Let me try to make some things clear, Jesus was born of Mary, but the Christ or the Logos or the Word existed from before time and took on flesh and became in Jesus fully human and fully God. We have confused things greatly for the last millennium, at least, as we have referred to Jesus Christ as though Christ was a family name, and we would formally call him Mr. Christ. Jesus the Christ is the more accurate form of address. So let us try to clear up some further confusion. Christ or more accurately Christos is the Greek word for Messiah which is a derivation from Biblical Hebrew. It means the anointed one. Logos is Greek for Word but specifically the Word of God. All this becomes much clearer if you look at the creation story in Genesis. We are all familiar with the first chapter of Genesis. It begins with ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth***, but from then on each new element was created because God said ***Let there be....*** In other words it was the Word of God that caused the creating; hence the line in our passage: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*** So let us be clear while Jesus was born, the Christ was not born because the Christ had existed in God from before time. The Christ became indwelling in the babe and they became one.

As well you know, John's Gospel was the last of the Gospels, but all the Gospels were written after all of Paul's letters. In Colossians, Paul, writing in the fifties or very early sixties, has his own statement that closely parallels our passage from John: With the heading the Supremacy of Christ, Paul writes: ***He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*** Colossians 1: 15 – 17

Paul chooses Christ, the anointed one, John chooses the Word of God they are speaking of the same creative power of God from before all time that became incarnate in Jesus. For me, I think John Alexander Shaia, an American/Lebanese theologian expresses this well: ***Jesus the Christ is a human-divine "unified reality" that presents two faces to us: one that is loving and familiar and another that***

is vast and mysterious. We can pray to them both just as Christians have for many centuries. Jesus walks with us in our hearts as the visible, human manifestation of the Christ. We know that when we pray to Jesus our sense of relationship is close and intimate. We can feel that he holds our hand firmly in his. The Christ, our God, is the other face. The Christ is ineffable Mystery, that we experience in our deepest core, feelings and experiences we cannot contain by ourselves – our greatest pain and our overwhelming joy.

Contrast the story of the manger, the stable, and the ox and ass in Luke with our reading this evening from John's prologue. Even after 2 millennia the first is so intimate and so immediate; the second is so awe inspiring, so beyond the edge of our comprehension. I think that is what Shai means. In other words both Luke and John are true; Luke focuses on Jesus; John on the Christ. They come from different directions to the same ultimate reality: Jesus the Christ.

James Ussher (1581–1656), the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland in 1650 said that creation occurred at 6 p.m, October 22, 4004 BCE. He was among the first generation of those to commit what some have called the heresy of literalism. Nearly five centuries later, we know thanks to science, space travel, powerful telescopes and geologic research among other things, that creation began with the big bang about 13.8 billion years ago. It was not so much an explosion but an expansion of energy which continues today and will continue to the end of time. We know that every atom of our selves and all the world around us and far beyond into space was unleashed in that mysterious creation event. If with the mindset of the prologue of John's Gospel, we come to the creation story in Genesis, we can see that the big bang is what the Christ, the Logos, the Word set in train. Let us also see that before time a day is just an expression, it could have been infinity.

We can see in that mindset that science is not pitted against theology. Each in their way represent human striving to understand the Creator and all the Creator has wrought. Each level of new understanding only opens up whole worlds of new questions. Too long have science and theology been seen as enemies. Perhaps, the problem has been that both theologians and scientists, leave alone the rest of us, have been stuck in literalisms because we cannot bear to think of that which is beyond our comprehension; we cannot live with mystery, so we console ourselves with false certainties. Science and theology are, in fact, deeply allied. Think of the genius of the authors of John who 2 millennia ago in a mystic, mythic, deeply metaphorical way could point to this alliance. Indeed we might think of Science and Theology as we think of Luke and John – very different perspectives, equally, committed to understanding the same Mysteries. Perhaps the setting of John's prologue as a reading for the Annunciation is not so strange after all. Perhaps it is a small sign of the oneness of all creation.

Let us continue to worship and follow Jesus the Christ. Jesus who provides us with a human shaped entry point to all the Mystery of the universe and the Christ who has been with us from before time, timelessly saying, *Let there be.... Amen*