



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Christmas

#### The Work of Christmas

[RCL] Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12); John 1:1-14

This is John's Christmas. This is incarnation. No shepherds, no angels, no crèche, no Magi. John's story is so utterly unlike the familiar crèche or pageant. How on earth could one make this, John's story of the incarnation, into a pageant? It begins before time itself!

Note the opening words: "In the beginning..." The first to hear or read John's Gospel had heard these words before. We all have. The entire Bible begins with these words, "In the beginning, God created..." Jesus' origins are cosmic – at the very root of the universe, "all that is, seen and unseen." And we now know that fully 95% of the created universe is unseen: dark matter and dark energy. Only 5% is anything at all like us, and animals and rocks and trees and stars and planets. God's creation is mostly unseen.

John puts Jesus, the Word, the *logos*, present before anything was made. Before God said the word, "Light!" and there was light! God speaks and things come into being. Before God speaks, however, there was the "Word." In Greek that is *logos* – word.

But for Jews and Gentiles alike in the first century, this word *logos* meant more than what we think when we say "word." For at least six centuries before Christ came into the world, *logos* had currency among philosophers, and meant something like the principle of reason that rules the universe. *Logos* could also describe the Hebrew idea of wisdom – *hokma* in Hebrew, *sophia* in Greek. According to the rabbis, wisdom was responsible for creation. So universal is this Word, this *logos*, that it is in everything that has been created. There is nothing "made that was made" that is not made through this Word. This is why we promise in our Baptism to "seek and serve Christ in all persons." Christ as *logos* is in all persons and in all things. Thus, our need to care for the Earth and everyone and everything therein.

The Word, says John, is life. And this life is light – the light of the world. This light is a beacon that shines and cuts through all darkness – and darkness does not overcome this light. That is, there is evil, not just in people but in all the created order. Our redemption in and by the Word – the *logos* – is a vital part of a larger project – the redemption of the entire universe of God's creation.

Yet, we who come from this Word, this *logos*, do not readily recognize him. He comes to those of us who claim his name as our own – Christian – and yet we know him not. This continues to be a problem. Just look around us. Two thousand years of claiming his name as our own, and just how brilliantly does the world around us reflect this life-giving light? In a world of ongoing brutalities – torture, killings, mass shootings, capital murder as retribution, bombings, not to mention hunger, loneliness, hatred, bigotry, poverty, and rejection of strangers. We are promised that all who do receive him, accept him, follow him, are given *power* – power to become “children of God.” We say we receive, accept, and follow Jesus the Word, but is this at all reflected in all that we do or say? Or, in all that is done or said on our behalf by others who claim to know, receive, accept, and follow this Word?

It makes it all the more remarkable that this Word becomes flesh and blood and moves into the neighborhood. The text literally says he “tabernacled among us.” That is, he pitched his tent; this Word, this *logos*, set up shop right in our midst despite our not knowing him. We are meant, of course, to recall that other time in our tradition’s past when God tabernacled among us in the tent of meeting in the wilderness – that place where “the glory of the Lord filled the tent.” Again, we behold his glory!

For John, this is Christmas. The Word of God comes and pitches his tent to sojourn with us, giving us another chance to know, accept, and follow him. We behold his glory. He adopts us as his own.

A story is told about some Navy SEALs sent to free a group of hostages in one of the corners of the world. As they storm into the hiding place, they find the hostages huddled on the floor in a corner of the room. The SEALs tell them they are there to take them home. Get up and follow us. No one moves. They are so damaged by the experience of their captivity that they do not believe these are really people sent to set them free. So, one of these SEALs does something: he takes off his helmet, puts down his gun, gets down on the floor, softens his face, and huddles up next to the captives, putting his arms around a few of them. No guards would do this. He whispers, “We are like you. We are here to be with you and to rescue you. Let us take you home. Will you follow us?” One by one, the prisoners get up and are eventually taken to safety on an aircraft carrier and brought home.

Lots of rhetoric and ink have been spilled to explain the miracle of the incarnation – how it is God becomes one of us to take us home – to redeem us as a step in redeeming a broken world and broken universe. God sees us captive to many things, unwilling to simply step away from those things that keep us in prison – often prisons of our own making. In Jesus, God takes off all his glory, gets down on the floor with us, huddles up with us – tabernacles among us, pitches his tent among us – and whispers, “It is OK. I am with you. I am one of you now. Come with me, follow me, and I will take you home.”

John tells us that the essence of Christmas does not need a crèche, does not need shepherds, does not need angels, or greens, or red bows, or piles of gifts, or carols, or turkeys and roast beefs with all the trimmings. All Christmas needs is for us to know the Word. To accept the Word. To get up

and follow the Word. There is no way we can ever know all there is to know about God – but in Christ, the Word, we can see his light and the *logos*. He will lead us home. This is incarnation. This is Christmas. It is time now, writes Howard Thurman, for the work of Christmas to begin.

*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 people,  
    To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman, *The Mood of Christmas & Other Celebrations*

*Written by the Reverend Kirk Alan Kubicek. Ordained in the Diocese of Chicago in 1983, I served as a parish priest in the dioceses of Chicago, Connecticut and Maryland. After nearly 18 years as rector of St. Peter's in Ellicott City, MD, I spent six years as Chaplain and teacher at St. Timothy's School for Girls, an Episcopal and international boarding and day-school in Stevenson, MD. In the mid-1980's I was trained to work as a Stewardship Consultant through the Office of Stewardship at the Episcopal Church Center. I also helped to lead retreats for the Ministry of Money, a ministry of the Church of the Saviour, Washington, DC. Recently retired from full-time parish ministry, I do Interim and Supply work throughout the Diocese of Maryland. I also continue a lifetime as a drummer in various rock and jazz bands, currently playing with On The Bus, a Grateful Dead tribute band centered in the greater DC Metro region. I also use guitar and write music to supplement worship and the preaching event. Some of these songs can be seen on Youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/SoundsDivine1>. My sermons are archived at [www.perechief.blogspot.com](http://www.perechief.blogspot.com), and I have been writing for Sermons that Work for as long as I can remember! Feel free to contact me at [kkub@aol.com](mailto:kkub@aol.com).*