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Isaiah 61: 10 – 62: 3  
Galatians 3: 23 – 23; 4: 4 – 7Ps. 147: 13 – 21  
John 1: 1 – 18

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Have you ever really watched the dawn happen? No matter how dark the night has been, the eastern edge of the sky begins to lighten ever so slightly. The inky black changes almost imperceptibly to an aubergine, that deep, dark purple of a ripe eggplant. And then, depending upon the weather, a rose hue begins to rise and take over. Then, just before the sun appears above the horizon, corals and then oranges take over the show. And then, at last, the long night is over, and the sun has arrived and there is daylight once again.

Christmas celebrates the dawn of the Light coming into the world. The powers of darkness are overcome by the Light coming to share life with us. The long reign of sin and darkness is ended, and God's grace rises to take over the show and cover the earth. The Son of God has arrived, and evil is conquered forever more. C. S. Lewis wrote, "The pure light walks the earth; the darkness received into the heart of the deity is there swallowed up. Where, except in the uncreated light, can the darkness be drowned?" [Basis from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe/Narnia*] Where indeed?

Amidst our inundation by our cultural Christmas and by the sentimentality of the season, one of the hardest things to remember is that Christmas celebrates the Incarnation, and not just the Nativity. The sweet baby Jesus is a one-time historical event (momentous though it is!), while the Incarnation goes beyond time and space and is on-going even now.

In a sense, the Nativity is just the tip of the iceberg. It is the Incarnation, the enfleshment of the Word, the indwelling of God in our world, that changes everything for evermore. As author Frederick Buechner has written, "the birth of Jesus [makes] possible not just a new way of understanding life, but a new way of living it." And though the historical Jesus no longer walks the earth, God continues to take flesh and dwell among us in the men, women and children who form the Body of Christ today – us, the Church. What we are really celebrating with the Feast of the Incarnation, the Church's name for Christmas, is our redemption in Christ, and the transformation of all of Creation by God, who has chosen to pitch a tent, dwell among us and work through us.

But the Incarnation is a little harder for us to try to wrap our hearts and minds around than a little baby in a manger. It's mystical and mysterious. It's nebulous at best. And so, John, the evangelist, tries to shape it and pin it down for us. John is probably writing around 90 – 100 CE, though there are a few scholars who actually think John's Gospel is the earliest, possibly from around 50 CE. Whichever, John's Gospel is the most theologically complex of the four. John intends to directly parallel the opening of Genesis, "In the beginning..." His use of the word "logos" is mysterious and multivalent. ["Logos" has been coopted by contemporary society: McDonald's golden arches, Nike's swoosh, Under Armour's U/A] "Logos" means 'word' in Greek, but John infuses it with new layers of meaning, and he ties it to the Greek concept of  $\pi\omega\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  (poesis)– that is, bringing something into being which was not before.

If Jesus is indeed the Word, the Logos, that expression of God which speaks to us across all generations, then it is *in* the myriad of modes of human complexity and particularity that the Word comes to us today. In other words, Jesus is in us, thanks to the Incarnation. Our own stories have become melded with his, our own vocations are intimately and intricately intertwined with his; our life and our work directly relate to the example which Jesus set for us. As the Incarnation, Jesus embodied –

and embodies, through us – God’s purpose for all of Creation, which is to help every fragment of the Cosmos from rocks to rhinos from humus to humans, move toward redemption, or what process theologian, John Cobb, calls greater ‘harmony, intensity and novelty.’ And so, in our own journey as Christians, we will keep coming across opportunities to live out the meaning of Jesus as the Word of God. As writer, Isabel Anders, has said, that “may require a lifetime of obedience, of seeking Christ our Wisdom, of taking risks, and abandoning ourselves for the good of the Other. But, we will discover along this Way, the mystery of Jesus Christ made flesh *in our own beings.*”

Anglican priest and British theoretical physicist, John Polkinghorne, wrote [*One World*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1986] that reality is a multilayered unity. “I can perceive another person,” he says, “as an aggregation of atoms, an open biochemical system in interaction with the environment, a specimen of homo sapiens, an object of beauty, someone whose needs deserve my respect and compassion, a brother [or sister] for whom Christ died. All are true and all mysteriously coinhere in that one person. To deny one of these levels is to diminish both that person and myself, the perceiver; to do less than justice to the richness of reality.” It is in God the Creator, Polkinghorne writes, “the ground of all that is, in which these different levels find their lodging and their guarantee.” God is the connector, he writes, the one whose creative act “holds [together] the worldviews of science, aesthetics, ethics and religion, as expressions of [God’s] reason, joy, will and presence.” And this interconnected nature of the cosmos finds its fullest expression, Polkinghorne continues, in the concept of sacrament – an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. This makes for a wonderful fusion of science and theology, he says. He concludes, “Thus the Eucharist bread and wine, which the earth has given and human hands have made, become the Body and the Blood of Christ, the source of spiritual life. The *greatest* sacrament, compared to which all others are types and shadows, is the Incarnation, in which ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the one Son from the Father.’

So, on this Sunday that is, yes, still Christmas, that celebrates the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, the Light coming into the world, that reminds us that there is too much for us to conceive of in simply one day or even one week, let us close with the words to a traditional Pigmy hymn:

*In the beginning was God,  
Today is God,  
Tomorrow will be God.  
Who can make an image of God?  
He has no body.  
He is as a word which comes out of your mouth.  
That word! It is no more,  
It is past, and still it lives!  
So is God. +*