

Christmas 2 Epiphany 25 Sermon MoeNewb

Let us pray. Lord God, Heavenly Father, may we reflect upon what we hear in the scriptures and our lives. May we come to a deeper experience, of the revelation you give of yourself to us in Jesus, through him and the guiding and leading of the Holy Spirit. May we grow in love and be led into all truth. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Well today, I'd like us to share a reflection on Jesus, the Word made flesh.

We're told when the shepherds had left and returned to their field to their sheep, or perhaps they brought the sheep with them, Mary pondered these things in her heart. It's important that we ponder the deep mysteries of our faith, and of course the prologue from John's Gospel in particular, reveals something of the heart of our faith.

So it's suggested that every Christmas is a new beginning.

And today I hope you'll bear with me a little bit, because the prologue to John's Gospel has been a particular area of study for me, for much of my Christian walk, from certainly in the 1970s. And I've spent a lot of time reflecting upon the many issues raised. I remember I once, my second year at university, I had done basically a thesis on the American Revolution, put three essays together into one, but I in fact did much better in the exam on a question that I studied for only half an hour before the exam.

I did well in the paper, but I did extra well in the particular question that I only spent half an hour on. So the danger is when you know quite a lot about something that it's hard to bring it all together in a succinct way in a short period of time.

So the wise men are a very important part of the revelation of Christ, the birth of Christ.

And their coming to Christ, as those here at Christmas might remember, I emphasised the fact that they came from another culture, from Babylon. They probably knew of the prophecies of the birth of the Messiah. They were scientists of their time and their culture, which included the fact that they were astrologers.

So in fact they would have expected when the Messiah was born to be there some sign in the heavens, and that's of course how the sign, the star, drew them.

So I think it's important that we acknowledge that they, in a sense, in some ways, represent the journey of other cultures, not so much the Jewish culture, but other cultures, although in some ways the Jewish culture is caught up in this as well, but different cultures and particularly the way, we might say, of science. And of course God, in a sense, is drawing all people to himself through the many cultures of the world, and especially the major ones.

As Paul said in our reading from Ephesians today, 'As a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth'.

I always find it very interesting, and you've probably heard me say this before, that often people, to interpret what they want to in the scriptures, tend to interpret 'All' as not meaning 'All'. And I have a problem with that.

One very good scholar suggested in interpreting one passage of `all`, when Jesus said, I'll draw all people to myself, suggested it was a conditional `All`. Now I'm not quite sure what a conditional `All` is, because `All` means `All`. So Paul says there, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him.

So through the various cultures, there's much that we can learn from about our humanity and in our life journey, but of course particularly for us today and for the last few centuries, the scientific culture in our civilisation has been very prominent. If you remember the night before Jesus died, he promised that the Holy Spirit would lead his disciples into all truth, teach them all things. There's a sense where I think we need to trust that God is working through science as well, although it's a bit of a long, meandering journey, but not unlike the journey of the wise men.

I mean, we have many scientists who don't believe in God, but at the same time the benefits of science are quite extraordinary. I mean, some of us would not be alive today if it wasn't for the developments of science. If we lived 50 years ago, our lives would have been shorter, and we have great benefits from the work of scientists, and I think there is a process unfolding, as I'll say in a moment.

So the Holy Spirit is guiding science, revealing something of himself, something of God, and the creative energies as scientists pursue their various studies, and particularly those studies in cosmology, and you've heard me say this before, quantum mechanics, which is about subatomic particles, and in quantum mechanics, one of the things that has come out is just how everything is interconnected, and of course we believe that as Christians. When Paul says, one died, all died, one's been raised to life, all been raised to life, that is the interconnectedness of everything, the interconnectedness of all creation, and part of the interconnectedness of all creation is that we are all created through the Word. There's nothing that God, there's nothing in this universe that has not been made through the Word. Remember John tells us this in verse 3.

It is interesting to look at what the scientists are doing, and we might say in John's Gospel, the prologue in particular, and the revelation of the Gospel, we have what we might say is a theory of everything, or the universal truth, the universal truth, the universal has to include everything, but to just give you an example, Stephen Hawking, who I think started moving towards God in his latter time, he talked about his pursuit to have a theory of everything.

He said, "if we do discover a complete theory of the universe, it should in turn be understandable in broad principle to everyone, not just a few scientists, then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason, for then we would know the mind of God".

Well, In some ways we believe in the prologue, that theory of everything is revealed in the Gospel. As I said at Christmas `science and revelation will meet at the crib', but John's Gospel is far ahead of where scientists still are. So we're reminded of the importance of revelation, being aware that revelation is like with the shepherds, where they got a revelation from the angels, times when God speaks directly to someone, a lot of those moments are recorded in the scripture, but not obviously all of them.

But we also need to be mindful that each one of us is capable of **'reflective knowing'**.

Our society has put too much emphasis on analytical intelligence, rather than 'intuitive intelligence', and every one of us has, in a sense, and particularly those of us who follow Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we have an 'intuitive intelligence' that we can understand these deep mysteries. You're not going to come to understand John's prologue fully straight away, but it should be something that you meditate and reflect upon regularly, because every time you do, you'll come into a deeper experience of what is being talked about.

So part of our 'reflective knowing, or intuition', is how we are people of 'Faith'. Faith is a part of that dimension of knowing, we know through an inner experience. As the writer of the Hebrews says, "by faith we understand, [and this is very relevant today], that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible".

Now John begins his gospel so directly by saying, "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".

That leads us to reflect upon the story of creation, in a sense that is John pointing back to the Genesis story of creation, of how things happened in the beginning. Everything was made through the word. The word of creation is the light and life of the world.

Now one of the sad things, I don't necessarily have full academic approval for what I'm about to say, but I believe it is truer than some academic points of view, is that it's been a traditional teaching in Christianity that God created out of nothing. I don't think that's true. God created out of his own being.

In the Genesis story it says, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Or it could be, in a beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the Jewish commentary on that particularly says there could have been other universes before this one, which actually fits in with some of the scientific speculations that are going on at the moment.

But there might have been other universes before this one as well. So we just don't know. But this is where our creation started.

I don't often use Hebrew words, but this came to me when I was studying Hebrew in the 1970's. And the word for create is bara, which is only used when God creates, not when we create anything. And bara is made up of ba, which means son, and aleph, which is one.

So we have in the second word of the Bible, the word for God creating is through the son of the one, if you like, pointing to Jesus, pointing to what John is saying, how all things were created through Jesus, through the word, the eternal word of God. So the Genesis story is a very profound one. And we can reflect on it more deeply, of course, at other times.

But it's worth noting that when God first creates, there's just this dark mass, if you like, and then God says, let there be light. The word speaks light into creation. It's worth being

reminded that that light that God created on the first day was not the light of the sun, moon, and stars.

It was the light, the created light of the glory of God, which we can experience in our own journey of faith. The light of the sun, moon, and stars was created on the fourth day. Very important to remember that, that that light is far beyond just what we know as light from the sun, moon, and stars.

Now the whole story of the Genesis, of course, some people believe that the seven days, that that's how God created. But I'd like to suggest that some of the church fathers suggested, it's seven periods of time. And that's where we come into a very interesting journey, which we're just touching on lightly.

Because we, and I always wonder, what before Jesus came would scientists find? Because how has the fall affected creation? And we can't go into that today, except to say that we can assume for a moment that evolution is true, and if it is true, it's not incompatible with the Bible, because the seven periods of time, in a sense, outlines the process of evolution, finally coming with the last stage of evolution being the arrival of human beings some 300,000 years ago. It's also interesting to note that oxygen was not, was not really present in our universe until about 2.3 billion years ago, yet the universe is 13.7 billion years old. And you might say, why is God so slow? Why did God take so long? I mean, God could have done it much quicker.

So what's going on? But anyway, they're one of the mysteries. Now part of, of course, the falls has had a huge impact on both our human nature and the whole of creation, but also of us knowing the word of life, the creative word of God. We have glimpses of the creative word of God in the Old Testament, and of course in the Genesis Revelation, as I suggested.

But the darkness that came upon humanity in the world was why Jesus had to come. And hence we hear in John's Gospel, in the world, he was in the world, but the world knew him not. So that the divine word, the word of creation was there, the light and life of the world, the light of everyone who comes into the world, but in a sense, we were blinded to really see that word.

But now that Jesus has come, we can come to know that divine creative word. And of course, we come to know that divine creative word through the process of the redemption or through the process of revelation of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. And that lays a new foundation for the whole of human life, the whole of creation, but particularly for our lives as well, because we're told that if we come to know, believe in his name, we will become children of God.

And notice the word is become, so we're in a process of becoming children of God.

So after Jesus' death and resurrection, there's a whole new perspective given to us with Christmas. Hence why I say that science and revelation will meet at the crib, because they're new possibilities.

So what are these new possibilities?

They are that we can actually come to know the creative word of God in creation and experience something of what it is to become the children of God.

The story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, God's son, the eternal word, becoming a human being, is a story of how we experience eternal life in our hearts. The deeper we go into God and wait in silence, the more we experience through the Holy Spirit the coming of God's life-giving word in our lives, the word that communicates his love.

I think I might have quoted this at Christmas, but Thomas Keating said, "Mary shows us the coming of the eternal word in her body that we are lived in by God. God is living in us, not as a statue or picture, but as an energy ready to direct all actions moment by moment".

Of course, as I mentioned at the beginning, the Holy Spirit is, through Jesus' death and resurrection, leading us into all truth, teaching us all things.

And this is where we start to move into another depth of life, another level of life experience, of learning to experience the word, the creative word, in every aspect of creation. To see Christ in everything. To know Christ as the foundation of everything.

And this is not just talking about words, this is about us growing in our experience. There's a Gospel of Thomas which is one of the non-canonical Gospels, but it has some authority amongst many writers and theologians today. Jesus said, 'lift the stone and you will find me there'.

Learning to see Christ in every one of us, learning to see Christ in all creation, learning to see the word in each one of us, the word in all creation.

I'm wondering if you can say yet, have you yet experienced the word of life in your life? Have you come to experience in some way? When you look at plants, when you look at the world, do you see an energy that's common to everything? Do you have a sense that there's an energy that's common to everything?

Scientists are now starting to say that consciousness is common to everything and they're even suggesting that Jesus is the foundation of all consciousness and is the foundation of the consciousness of each and every one of us. And so that too is part of everything being held together in the word of God.

So learning to see the word is just such an important, or an experience of word, is such an important part of our journey.

I'm going to tell a personal story which I might have told before, but I learned to play the violin after I left school. I had played music at school, played the trumpet, very noisy, but I gave up the trumpet when I left school and started playing the flute and then I took up the violin.

I played the flute much better than the violin, but the violin fascinated me because you have to be so precise with your intonation for it to sound any good at all. And one day I was playing the violin and I heard this strange sound and I looked at, you know, you have

adjusters for the strings of the metal, I looked at anything on the violin that could make this strange sound and there was nothing. Suddenly I realised it was a sound of the sounds.

It was the word of God, the creative word of God in the sound that was common to every sound and if I listened to that sound I could play in tune. It was just amazing because it was the same core sound to all the different notes. And that's what in a sense Christ is.

He is the same core energy to all the energy of life. And that's, again, I keep saying we need to be looking for that. But the great wonder of it is that we actually find that in the fulfilment of the revelation that God is love.

That this divine word, in fact, is the source of God's love in each and every one of us. And it's that divine word that gives us the power to love one another in the power of the Holy Spirit. As John says, 'we know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another'.

Interestingly, I can suggest that perhaps you follow this sermon or reflection up by reading the first letter of John because it just sums up so importantly what love is. He also says 'the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says I am in the light while hating a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light'.

Now we can learn a lot from that in the church, couldn't we? We don't see relationships that fully, at times we don't see relationships, particularly in the wider church, that fully recognise that sort of truth.

John goes on to say,

"Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love".

So there are many ways that we can come now through Jesus' death and resurrection, leading us back in a sense to experience what happened at his birth, the word becoming flesh.

There are many ways we can now come to speak, to hear what that word is, the source of the light and life of everyone, light and life of each and every one of us. We can grow in the deep experience of that in many, many ways, but primarily by following the fundamental teaching of the Christian faith, and that is to love God and love our neighbour as ourself. A new commandment I give to you, love one another as I have loved you.

Let us pray. Lord God, Heavenly Father, we thank you for the amazing revelation you've given yourself to us in Jesus, and through him we can come to know your word of life, your creative word, in the heart of each and every one of us. We can learn to see your creative word in all creation as we're guided by the Holy Spirit.

Help each one of us to come deeper into the experience of what it is for the word to be made flesh in us, and guide us and help us to truly love one another as you love us.

We pray this in Jesus' name.

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